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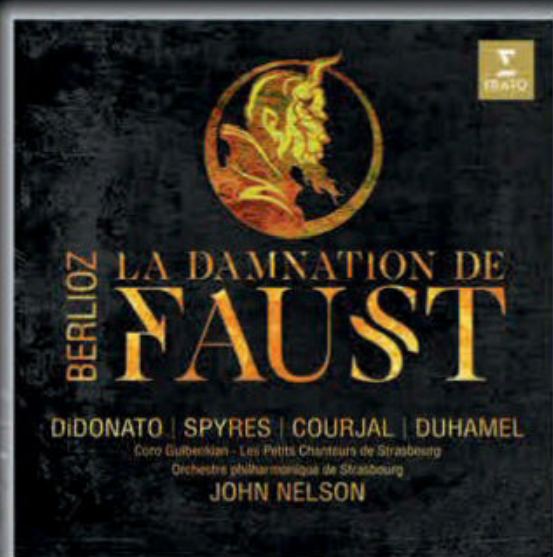
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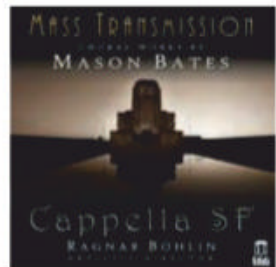
A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Bates

Mass Transmission. Rag of Ragnar. Sirens

Cappella SF / Ragnar Bohlin

Delos © DE3573 (54' • DDD • T/t)



The works by Mason Bates that tend to draw the most attention are

his orchestral scores and the 2017 opera *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*. But the American composer has also penned a sizeable number of pieces for chamber ensembles and voices. Bates's versatility is further revealed on this disc of superb choral works featuring the inspired Cappella SF.

In *Sirens*, six movements of beguiling and varied settings for a cappella chorus, Bates embraces an assortment of languages and musical styles to depict the seductive creatures of mythology and, with a passage from the New Testament, Jesus's holy powers of persuasion. The composer's keen imagination for colour and motion can be felt in undulating waves evoked by the choristers in an excerpt from *The Odyssey*. When Heine is the poet, the music reflects the German source, while a text by Pietro Aretino receives Italianate treatment and a movement in native Quechua reflects that culture.

Bates is noted for his novel employment of electronics, which are put to striking use in *Mass Transmission*, scored also for chorus, soloists and organ. The three movements portray the real-life tale of long-distance radio transmissions between a mother (in Holland) and daughter (in Java). Amid occasional radio static, the piece weaves a poignant narrative in which choral lines – based on historical texts – are mixed with sampled sounds and vibrant organ sonorities.

Both works could hardly have more incisive and seamless champions than Cappella SF, which Ragnar Bohlin, chorus director of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, founded in 2013. (He is paid tribute here at the end in Bates's riotous *Rag of Ragnar*.) Lucky is the composer

whose music is brought to life by these exceptional singers. **Donald Rosenberg**

Makan

Dream Lightly^a. If we Knew the Sky.

Still^b. Tender Illusions

^bCharles Dimmick *vn* ^bPeter Sulski *va*

^aSeth Josel *elec gtr* Boston Modern

Orchestra Project / Gil Rose

BMOP/sound © 1066 (61' • DDD/DSD)



I was rather taken with Keeril Makan's hour-long sextet *Letting Time Circle Through Us*

(New World, 12/17). Makan's meditative take on composition and compositional techniques was mesmeric, and there is more of the same in the four works collected here. However, one needs to adjust one's aural focus from work to work more acutely than with most composers' music. I confess it took me two or three playthroughs to adjust fully. The nominal title-track, *Dream Lightly* (2008), is a 14-minute single-movement concerto for electric guitar in which even the tuning of the instruments represents a mechanism for moving the music forwards. There is a haunting, dreamlike quality to much of it, especially the opening and closing sections with their play of harmonics.

The longest and most complex track, *If we Knew the Sky* (2014), is a large-scale tone poem (to use an old-fashioned term) dominated by the sound of bells – primarily a pair of vibraphones – sounding to my innocent ear like a Far Eastern temple ritual. At first hearing it seems stuck in a series of loops over its initial cadences, but as one listens closer one realises that there is more going on beneath the surface. To be honest, I think it could have been expressed in a much shorter timeframe, but its 25-minute length is part of the point.

Both *Tender Illusions* (2010) and *Still* – a concertante piece for violin, viola and orchestra (2006) – operate with much briefer (10-minute) durations. Whereas some listeners could find *If we Knew the Sky* outstaying its welcome, that should not be

said for the companion works. The performances sound very fine throughout, electric guitarist Seth Josel the pick of the soloists, but the real stars are the Boston Modern Orchestra Project themselves. First-rate sound, too. **Guy Rickards**

'Almost All-American'

'21st-Century Works for Clarinet'

JM Barker ... to the pale green sea of evening^a

Brandon Divertimento for Woodwind Quartet^b

Eidson Birds of Passage^c **JM Stephenson**

Bagatelle^d. Clarinet Sonata^d. Fantasie^d

Christopher Nichols *cl*

^cAugustine Mercante *countertenor* ^bEileen Grycky *fl*

^bJeffrey O'Donnell *ob* ^bLynn Moncilovich *bn*

^aJennifer Margaret Barker, ^{cd}Julie Nishimura *pf*
Albany © TROY1788 (64' • DDD)



The Clarinettist Christopher Nichols and his musical crew (almost all from the University of Delaware) give affectionate performances of music in a conservative vein, mostly written since 2013, which Nichols calls some of his 'favourite individual and consortium commissioning projects' and which have become 'core pieces of his repertoire'.

The programme is bookended by James M Stephenson, whose 'Liquid Melancholy' CD with Chicago Symphony clarinettist John Bruce Yeh received a 2019 Grammy nomination. His 20-minute Sonata explores the wonderfully mellifluous things the instrument can do, with a delightful 'Jam-Bourrée' interlude for E flat clarinet. Stephenson's most substantial piece is the second movement of his two-movement *Fantasie*, a 2015 arrangement of the composer's original for trumpet, featuring exquisitely gentle lyrical writing for both clarinet and piano leading to a charming dialogue between the two instruments.

The most lively is Sy Brandon's Divertimento for woodwind quartet; the composer has written for *Performance Today* and the Animal Planet cable channel, and his three-movement Divertimento, consisting of a 'Frolic', 'Ballad' and

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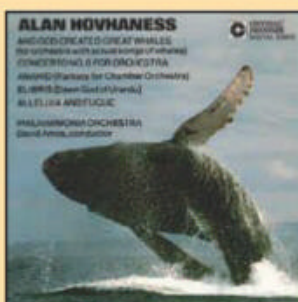
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Imaginative programming: Jenny Lin juxtaposes études by contemporary New York-based composers with more familiar examples by established masters

'Tarantella', is just the type of affectionately adventurous music you'd like your grandchildren to grow up and play.

The most haunting is Scottish-American Jennifer Margaret Barker's ... *to the pale green sea of evening*, a lovely invocation of the Mediterranean colours and moods of Malta and Gozo. The most intriguing is Joseph Eidson's *Birds of Passage*, set to two Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poems, one about bleak autumn and the other about the joys of Creation, particularly notable for countertenor Augustine Mercante's lyrical intensity and the way he polishes each word with lapidarian ecstasy.

Laurence Vittes

'The Études Project, Vol 1

Andersen Walk V **Baez** Étude No 1, 'Corona' **Boyd** Lilac **Burtzos** Should the Wide World Roll Away **Chien** To the Convergence **Chin** Étude No 6, 'Grains' **Chopin** Étude, Op 10 No 4 **D Cooper** Étude No 1, 'Unleashed' **Crawford Seeger** Study in Mixed Accents **Debussy** Étude No 11, 'Pour les arpèges composés' **Glass** Étude No 13 **Grafe** Accretion **Healy** Étude for Melancholy Robots No 3, 'Trains' **Hosokawa** Étude No 1, '2 Lines' **Ligeti** Étude No 1, 'Désordre' **Messiaen** Quatre Études de rythme - No 1, Ile de feu **Rachmaninov** Étude-tableau, Op 33 No 4 **Russ** Knuckles **Scriabin** Étude, Op 8 No 2 **Stafylakis** Obstinata 1, 'Barbed Wire' **Jenny Lin** *pf*

Sono Luminus © DSL92236 (63' • DDD)



Imaginative programme concepts have long been second nature to Jenny Lin, who launches an 'Études Project' that pairs works by the young New York-based composer collective Iceberg alongside relatively 'established' counterparts. The juxtapositions are fascinating. The jagged declamations and muffled filigree characterising Max Grafe's *Accretion* complement the more firmly etched rhythmic intricacies of Messiaen's 'Ile de feu' Étude. And the whimsical scales and ambidextrous back-and-forth of Alex Burtzos's dubiously titled *Should the Wide World Roll Away* makes for an odd yet ultimately convincing lead-in to Chopin's bravura Op 10 No 4 Étude.

By contrast, the persistent trills and unpredictable register shifts in Yu-Chun Chien's *To the Convergence* markedly contrast with the starker sound world of Toshio Hosokawa's '2 Lines'. Derek Cooper's 'Unleashed' is an effective study that's largely cast in asymmetric unison lines. It naturally leads into Ruth Crawford Seeger's texturally similar *Study in Mixed Accents*. Lin plays the Crawford slower and more sharply articulated now than she did

for her 2002 all-Crawford recital on BIS, which contains three intriguingly different interpretations of the same piece.

On the other hand, I fail to divine any musical connection between Harry Stafylakis's gnarly, unpredictable 'Barbed Wire' and Rachmaninov's D minor *Étude-tableau*, Op 33 No 4. Likewise, Drake Andersen's intriguingly discontinuous *Walk* seems completely unrelated to Scriabin's Op 8 No 2 Étude. But there are loose commonalities between the unfettered rock influence in Jonathan Russ's *Knuckles* and Philip Glass's Étude No 13. Lin's performance of the Glass, incidentally, is crisper and more varied in touch than the one in her Steinway & Sons complete Glass Études cycle.

There are a few instances where a piece that might sit well by itself winds up being overshadowed by its partner. As much as I appreciate the uncomplicated and attractive lyricism of Stephanie Ann Boyd's *Lilac*, it sounds uncomfortably simplistic next to the voluptuous harmonic invention throughout Debussy's 11th *Étude*. Likewise, the motoric momentum in parts of Will Healy's 'Trains' more or less justifies its title, yet the music's generic dissonance takes a back seat to the piece that follows, namely Ligeti's 'Désordre'. Lin, incidentally, plays the Ligeti wonderfully well, pedalling

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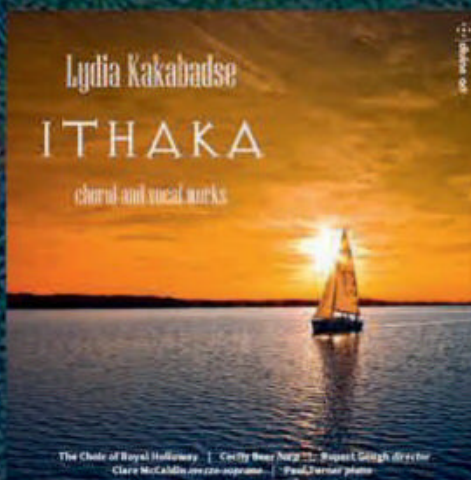
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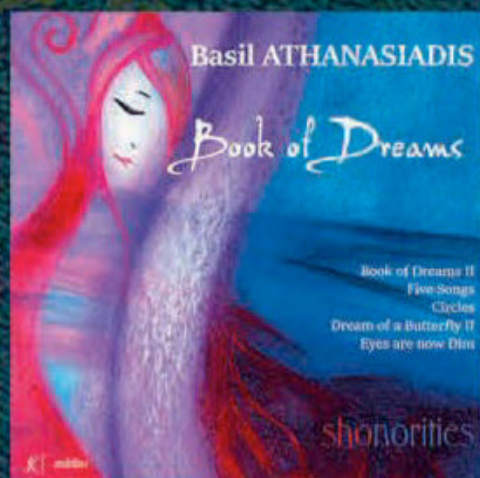
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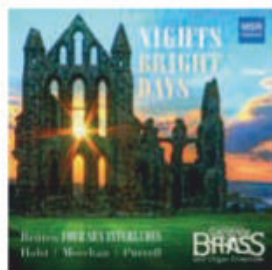
sparely and emphasising its multi-level melodic contours.

Whatever Lin has planned for Vol 2, you can be sure that this pianist will avoid routine like the plague, as she does with every new release. **Jed Distler**

'Nights Bright Days'

Britten Four Sea Interludes and Passacaglia from Peter Grimes **Holst** I love my love (arr Craig Garner) **Meechan** Love Songs **Purcell** Come, ye sons of art (arr Craig Garner)

Chicago Gargoyle Brass and Organ Ensemble
MSR Classics © MS1704 (64' • DDD)



The Chicago Gargoyle Brass and Organ Ensemble (you will have to go far to find such a wonderfully named band) was formed in 1992 by students

of the University of Chicago, whose faculty buildings, I am reliably informed, feature many, albeit faux, gargoyles. There is nothing faux about the exuberance of the playing of the eight brass and three organ-playing gargoyles, with their three percussionists, all of whom feature at times – but never all together – on this well-played and diverse programme.

The bulk of their repertoire, at least as highlighted here, comes from arrangements, those here made by Craig Garner, who is without doubt an accomplished arranger. His treatment of the Symphony from Purcell's ode *Come, ye sons of art* (1694, using Rebecca Herrisone's edition) is nicely done, and the lyrical acuity of the succeeding aria is replicated in Holst's *Song without Words*, originally the slow movement of his Second Suite (1911; later reworked as a part-song, 'I love my love'). By contrast,

Peter Meechan's *Love Songs* are more complex, setting Shakespeare's Sonnets 71, 147, 43 (providing the disc's title) and 116 for a combination of male narrator, chorus and brass, with protracted instrumental introductions prefacing the vocal settings.

The cream of the crop on the disc, however, are the arrangements for brass, organ, piano and timpani of Britten's Four Sea Interludes and Passacaglia from *Peter Grimes*. Some of the Interludes – particularly 'Sunday Morning' and 'Storm' – come off more naturally for this ensemble than others; the opening organ solo in 'Dawn' is near inaudible due to poor balance. The Passacaglia, however, is truly electrifying, as intense an account as I have encountered, with the piano – here played by Mark Sudeith, organist in the Meechan and Holst works – an evocative replica of the opera's celesta. **Guy Rickards**

The Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 2011

Architect Moshe Safdie

Capacity Helzberg Hall: 1600 seats;

Muriel McBrien Kauffman Theater: 1800 seats

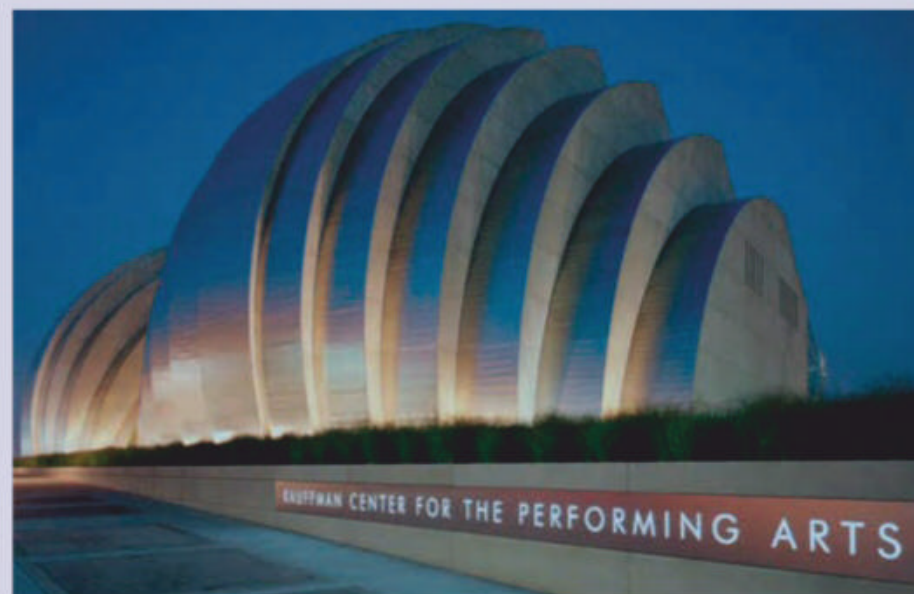
Resident ensemble Kansas City Symphony

Boldly etched against the Kansas City skyline, the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts opened its doors for the first time in September 2011. Funded entirely by private donors, it is a thoroughly impressive centrepiece of civic achievement and a symbol of cultural revival and aspiration in the Midwest.

Designed as a cultural campus by architect Moshe Safdie, the two steel-clad shells form the theatre and concert hall respectively. A dazzling atrium links both, its 300-foot wide glass curtain wall showing off the glowing interior to those outside, and the south city view to those within.

The 1800-seat Muriel McBrien Kauffman Theater is the performance home of the Ballet and the Lyric Opera. Taking its cue from European opera houses, it is designed in vineyard style; its glowing murals were painted by local artists. The 1600-seat Helzberg Hall, centred around a stunning, sculpturally arranged Casavant organ, is the home of the Kansas City Symphony. Its acoustic has garnered much critical acclaim. Yo-Yo Ma described it as 'absolutely sublime', saying that it is 'like you're inside an instrument'. The Symphony conductor, Michael Stern, credits the alchemy involved to acoustician Yasuhisa Toyota. Warmth of sound is not sacrificed to clarity; thanks to wraparound sides, nobody is more than 100 feet from the stage, enhancing the intimacy of the experience.

A world-class acoustic has been transformative not only for audiences but for players, who are only as good as the sound they know that they are producing. Their former space,



the Lyric Theatre, had worked against them; they had to work the music hard to be heard adequately. Here, they had to change the way they played: the slightest sound could be easily heard. Indeed, there was an agonising time when they were rehearsing in the Hall before the official opening but going back to play performances in the Lyric.

With this transition well behind them, the Symphony's partnership with Reference Recordings has blossomed. In 2018 a CD featuring specially commissioned work by Adam Schoenberg was nominated for two Grammy Awards. They recently released Holst's *The Planets*, which will be reviewed in the next issue.

Safdie envisioned that the Center would be a set for playing out the ritual of public life in the city, and by every metric he has succeeded. Flamboyant and modernist, the Kauffman Center represents, according to its chief benefactor, Julia Irene Kauffman, 'a building for today and for generations to come'. **Hilary Stroh**

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Photograph: Coro San Carlo di Pesaro performing Rossini’s ‘Stabat Mater’, Chiesa di San Giovanni in Monte, Bologna, a concert from Martin Randall Festival ‘Music in Bologna’ in 2018. ©Ben Ealovega.



A LETTER FROM *Minneapolis*

Rob Hubbard reports on the varied and vibrant music scene of Minnesota's Twin Cities



Minneapolis and St Paul are called the Twin Cities, but these twins have distinctly different personalities. Lake-laden Minneapolis tends towards shiny modern skyscrapers while hilly St Paul has prided itself on restoring late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings and homes. They're largely divided by the south-flowing Mississippi River, so it's been said that St Paul is where the eastern United States ends and Minneapolis where the west begins.

For a metropolitan area of four million people, it boasts an extraordinarily vibrant arts scene. Classical concert-goers have their choice of two major orchestras, a very successful professional opera company and chamber music from an impressive roster of internationally renowned virtuosos and ensembles. Add two major art museums, dozens of theatre companies and many modern dance troupes (and a plethora of clubs and concert venues offering rock, funk, folk, blues, jazz and world music), and you have one of North America's most exciting creative communities.

Budget-wise, the state's largest arts organisation is the Minnesota Orchestra, which was in danger of major self-inflicted damage when management locked its musicians out in the autumn of 2012. This hardball contract-negotiating strategy, usually reserved for the industrial sector, ended with a settlement in early 2014.

It took a couple of seasons, but the orchestra is back to the full-bodied sound and passionate interpretations for which it was known pre-lockout. Music director Osmo Vänskä and the orchestra are on their third symphonic cycle, having recorded all of Beethoven's (including shortlists for a 2007 Grammy and a 2009 *Gramophone* Award) before beginning a widely celebrated Sibelius cycle, one recording winning a 2014 Grammy.

Now they have moved on to Mahler, and the concerts that precede the recording sessions are invariably breathtaking, full of the imagination and disarming emotional intensity for which Vänskä and the orchestra have become known. Vänskä concludes his music directorship in 2022 after 19 years. Recently, he and the orchestra blazed new touring trails, becoming the first major American orchestra to perform in Cuba and South Africa.

The St Paul Chamber Orchestra's musicians were also locked out in the autumn of 2012 but reached a contract agreement six months later. The number of full-time musicians went from 34 to 28 but the musicians gained more creative control, including one of the ensemble's violinists, Kyu-Young Kim, becoming artistic director.

The SPCO has mostly eschewed conductors in favour of collaborators, launching a leadership job-share model in 2004

with a team of 'artistic partners', who generally come to the Twin Cities two or more times per season for stretches of three to five years. Past partners have included the soprano Dawn Upshaw and violinists Joshua Bell and Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

The current roster features the pianist Jeremy Denk – who opened the season with an achingly yearning Schumann Concerto – and harpsichordist/conductor Richard Egarr, whose tenure began with an October programme of Bach and Telemann. Fellow early music devotee Jonathan Cohen is also on the team, as are the composer/commentator Rob Kapilow and violinist Pekka Kuusisto, who will travel to New York's Lincoln Center with the SPCO in May. While the orchestra calls St Paul's acoustically sublime Ordway Concert Hall home, the SPCO – which celebrated its 60th birthday this autumn – will play at 20 venues throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area this season.

Alas, the SPCO is phasing out the 'Liquid Music' presentations that cross-pollinate genres and art forms. But the Schubert Club –

a 137-year-old chamber music presenter – is making sure there's little lapse in adventurous programming with its 'Schubert Club Mix' concerts, which started with

the Danish String Quartet performing music from its 'Last Leaf' recording (ECM, 12/17), opening a season-long local residency.

The Schubert Club is best known for its International Artist Series of recitals, which opened with a late-October concert by Joshua Bell and pianist Alessio Bax and will feature performances by pianist Daniil Trifonov and soprano Angela Gheorghiu before season's end. Its 'Music in the Park' chamber music series at a small St Paul church has featured performances by the Montrose Trio and the Modigliani Quartet.

The SPCO and the Schubert Club are among the chief tenants of St Paul's Ordway Center. Among the others is Minnesota Opera, which opened its season with a fascinating, splendidly sung staging of Richard Strauss's *Elektra* that took place on a 1920s silent movie set upon which Sophocles' tragedy unfolded. In addition to Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* and Mozart's *Don Giovanni* this season, Minnesota Opera will present Jonathan Dove's *Flight* and give the premiere of Paola Prestini's *Edward Tulane*.

The Twin Cities suffered a loss in February with the death of the composer Dominick Argento. His decades at the University of Minnesota made the area a destination for young composers, many of whom have settled here – including two of his students, Stephen Paulus and Libby Larsen, who founded one of the great resources for their profession in the St Paul-based American Composers Forum. **G**

The orchestra is back to the full-bodied sound and passionate interpretations for which it was known pre-lockout

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Music connects us to the past and the future

The end of the year: a time when people look both backwards and forwards. And at *Gramophone*, we're no different; reflecting on something with the perspective a little distance from an event brings is both healthy and enjoyable. Our Critics' Choice feature, in which our reviewers name their favourite release from the past year, is always among the most popular for both readers and writers. Some albums appear twice, affirmation (if needed) of their quality; I hope it helps to make your Christmas shopping that little bit easier.

But of course we also look further back than that. Art always does, and should; it's one of the most powerful means humanity has of offering to the present the understanding of the past, and to make that meaningful for our own lives (and we're fortunate indeed that this has been further enriched by a century of recording technology). Something of this lies in the title our writer Michelle Assay gives to her fascinating, personal exploration of the legacy of one the greatest pianists of the recording era: 'Vladimir Horowitz, our contemporary'. How is this virtuoso a man of our own era? In the same way, she contends, that Shakespeare's characters are relevant today, crafted as they are with a psychological insight that transcends the years. It is for this same reason that the greatest music, be it by Beethoven or Mozart – to which Horowitz added his own poetry – is also contemporary.

Horowitz is of course not the composer but the means through which the art reaches us. But speaking of composers, we look back to Mieczysław Weinberg this issue, following an anniversary year in which the



Martin

committed advocacy of artists such as Birmingham's superb young conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla has sought to make his music better known, following decades of relegation to relative obscurity – except within one arena, that is, in which his music was explored: recordings. Where concert-hall programmers cannot always take risks on repertoire, recording has so often managed to tend a flame for devotees of the day and for audiences of the future.

And what of looking forwards? Competitions continue to provide a pointer to the artists who may well shape the future of our art form (and who knows, may serve as the means by which future listeners may seek to understand something of our own age). Each December we publish our special focus on competitions. The list of laureates of many of them is testimony to their perceptiveness (that old investors' caveat 'past performance is not a guide to the future' only partially applies here), but these days competitions are about more than just picking out winners. The best organisations will nurture those artists' careers through those heady and difficult first few years, and many of them will offer us, audiences throughout the world, a way to experience the excitement via streaming and broadcasts, and to judge for ourselves.

So whether the weeks ahead involve immersing yourselves in masters of the past, exploring performances of the present, or seeking out the stars of tomorrow, may I wish you all wonderful listening, and a very happy Christmas.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



Being in touch with the music and personality of Vladimir Horowitz for the past few months has been one of

the most pleasant things I've ever done, and also one of the most responsible and terrifying ones,' says **MICHELLE ASSAY**. 'I care a great deal for this pianist who first inspired me to go to the piano.'



'The Weinberg discography has grown exponentially since his death in 1996, in proportion to

his dramatic resurgence in the concert hall and opera house,' says **DAVID FANNING** who writes about the composer this month. 'The quality of recent issues has made my survey a labour of love.'



'Words don't come easily to Andris Nelsons, at least not in English and at 8 o'clock in the morning,'

says **PETER QUANTTRILL**, who interviews the conductor about Bruckner, Beethoven and more this issue. 'But when they do come, they're infused with warmth for both music and his fellow musicians.'

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Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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NEW RELEASE
November 2019
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“PER IL CASTELLO”

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ACCADEMIA BIZANTINA
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Vivaldi Concerti per violino VII 'Per il castello'

ALESSANDRO TAMPIERI

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CHANDOS
THE SOUND OF CLASSICAL

40

THE BEST OF CHANDOS 2019



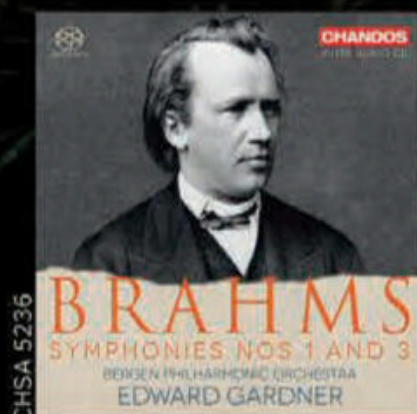
LANDMARKS: CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF CHANDOS

Released to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the label, this handsomely packaged 40-disc set comprises 40 complete recordings from Chandos' extensive catalogue. Each of the four decades is represented, and each recording has been hand-picked by the Managing Director, Ralph Couzens, because it represents a turning point, or 'Landmark', in the development of the label.

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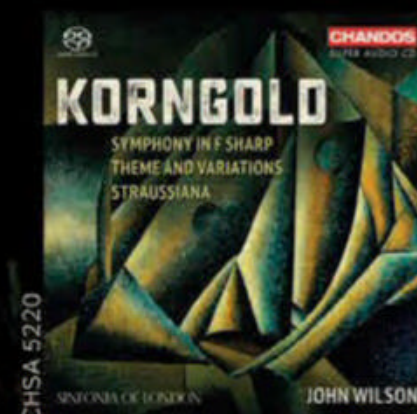
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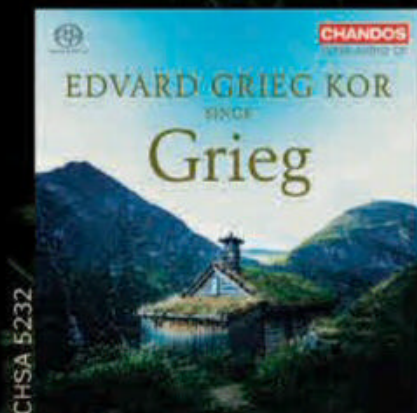
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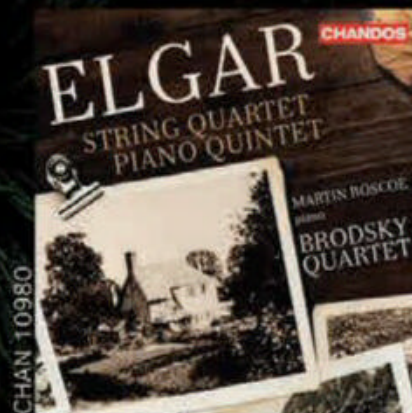
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BERLIOZ
Symphonie fantastique
Les Siècles /
François-Xavier Roth
Harmonia Mundi
► **MARK PULLINGER'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 62**

What better way to draw Berlioz's anniversary year to a close than with this revelatory, highly compelling recording: François-Xavier Roth is a master of finding detail, and making it truly count.

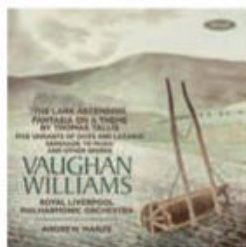


BEETHOVEN
Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 5
Martin Helmchen *pf*
Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin /
Andrew Manze

Alpha

This recording really stands out among the pre-anniversary Beethoven releases for its fine sense of collaborative musicianship.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



VAUGHAN WILLIAMS
The Lark Ascending, etc
James Ehnes *vn* Royal
Liverpool Philharmonic
Orchestra /
Andrew Manze

Onyx

An album of RVW's most-loved orchestral pieces – and ones rarely performed with such grace and sensitivity as here.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



CPE BACH
Complete Original Works
for Violin & Keyboard
Tamsin Waley-Cohen *vn*
James Baillieu *pf*
Signum

The real achievement here is the sense of lyrical line that Tamsin Waley-Cohen carries through all the sonatas, in a perfect partnership with the pianist James Baillieu.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



BEETHOVEN Three
Violin Sonatas, Op 12
James Ehnes *vn*
Andrew Armstrong *pf*
Onyx

The second of two appearances this month for James Ehnes, joined here by Andrew Armstrong, in performances which gloriously justify these works' status as truly collaborative sonatas.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 82**



BRAHMS Piano Sonata
No 3. 'Paganini' Variations
Nelson Goerner *pf*
Alpha
In the F minor Sonata,
Goerner's awareness

of the architecture and ambition of the whole piece feels evident throughout, while the Variations possess a deep sense of the musicality within the virtuosity.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



D SCARLATTI
Keyboard Sonatas, Vol 6
Pierre Hantaï *hpd*
Mirare

To join Pierre Hantaï on any leg of his long-standing and superb Scarlatti journey is to be shown joyful new sights, be introduced to delightful ideas, and ultimately offered a richly enjoyable listening experience.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 96**



GESUALDO
Madrigals, Books 1 & 2
Les Arts Florissants /
Paul Agnew
Harmonia Mundi

Here is proof that Les Arts Florissants's music-making is every bit as fine now under Paul Agnew as when the group first tackled Gesualdo some 30 years ago under founder William Christie.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 103**



HANDEL Samson
Dunedin Consort /
John Butt
Linn
John Butt really
does excel at these

explorations of monumental major works; the performance is wonderful, while the level of historical and musical enquiry further enriches our appreciation.

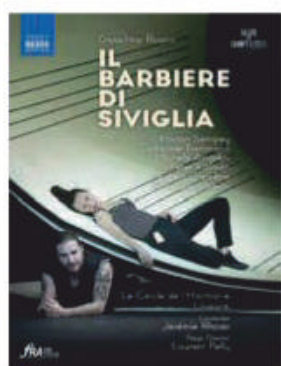
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 104**



GLUCK
Orfeo ed Euridice
La Nuova Musica /
David Bates
Pentatone
Magnificent and

moving singing from Iestyn Davies and Sophie Bevan, and playing of intensity from La Nuova Musica; a triumphant release from our new Label of the Year, Pentatone.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 116**



DVD/BLU-RAY
ROSSINI Il barbiere di Siviglia
Sols; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie / Jérémie Rhorer
Naxos

For reviewer and leading Rossinian Richard Osborne to so highly praise this production's union of work and realisation is noteworthy acclaim indeed!

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 119**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
Beethoven, Bach etc
Lola Bobesco *vn*
Melo Classic

This is Rob Cowan's top pick from a whole host of fascinating historic releases from Melo Classic that he reviews this month.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 132**

FOR THE RECORD

National Symphony Orchestra launches own label

America's National Symphony Orchestra has launched its own label. The first album – due for release on February 21 – will be of Copland's Suite from *Billy the Kid* paired with Dvořák's Symphony No 9, conducted by the orchestra's Music Director Gianandrea Noseda. It was recorded live in June.

The recording venture is being produced in partnership with LSO Live, the London Symphony Orchestra's pioneering label which launched 20 years ago and has since formed own-label collaborations with the Mariinsky Theatre, King's College, Cambridge, and Colin Currie Records, founded by the British percussionist.

'The National Symphony Orchestra and I are thrilled to present this first album on our new label,' said Noseda.

'We believe that recordings are an essential part of an orchestra's life because they capture singular musical experiences for future generations to enjoy. We are excited that listeners



Caption to be supplied

Conductor Gianandrea Noseda is on a mission to take the music of the National Symphony Orchestra to listeners worldwide

worldwide will be able to hear the emotional and powerful results of the concerts we perform throughout the year at the Kennedy Center's Concert Hall in Washington, DC.'

Idagio: now you can listen for free

Classical specialist streaming service Idagio has launched a free option. Established four years ago, and offering a catalogue of two million tracks, Idagio has, to date, only offered a subscriber product. A Premium service remains – the highest version offering lossless audio quality – but the free option will still provide recommendations, a feature that suggests listening based on selected moods, and some exclusive-to-Idagio recordings from the Vienna Philharmonic, Sir Simon Rattle and Valery Gergiev. Another interesting aspect of Idagio is that artists are paid according to time listened to, by the second, not by track.

Russell Davies moves to MDR

Dennis Russell Davies has been named the new conductor of the MDR Orchestra Leipzig from the start of the 2020/21 season. Noted for his work in contemporary music, particularly the music of Philip Glass, he will succeed Kristian Järvi, who stepped down last year.

BMG launches new label

A new label called Modern Recordings has been launched by BMG. It will cover classical, jazz and electronic music, mostly instrumental but also including singer-songwriters. The first release, called 'Twilight People', features married musicians countertenor Andreas Scholl and

pianist Tamar Halperin. The album will pair folk-song arrangements by 20th-century composers including Benjamin Britten, Aaron Copland and Ralph Vaughan Williams with specially composed songs by Israeli composer Ari Frankel and Egyptian oud virtuoso Joseph Tawadros. The label will be run by Christian Kellersmann, who in a previous role at Universal Music launched the 'Yellow Lounge' classical club nights.

Emelyanychev extends at SCO

The Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Principal Conductor Maxim Emelyanychev (who only conducted his inaugural concerts in the post this autumn) have already extended their partnership until 2025. 'Conducting the SCO is always like performing with family,' he said. 'When you have an orchestra of musicians as fine as these, who wouldn't want to play with them as much as possible?' Their first release will be of Schubert's Ninth Symphony on Linn, reviewed next issue.

Resonus records Mark Bebbington

Pianist Mark Bebbington will record a series of French music for Resonus Classics. The first release – due out on February 28 – will feature Poulenc's *Concert champêtre*, originally written for harpsichord or piano. In recent years Bebbington has built a well-received catalogue on the Somm label – for which he will continue to record – including most recently an Editor's Choice disc of Arnold Bax and Harriet Cohen.

Cristian Măcelaru in new Paris post

Cristian Măcelaru, one season into his post as Chief Conductor of the WDR Sinfonieorchester, has been named the new Music Director of the Orchestre National de France. He succeeds Emmanuel Krivine (who directed the orchestra on *Gramophone's* 2019 Recording of the Year, two Saint-Saëns piano concertos with Bertrand Chamayou for Erato). The Romanian conductor takes up the post at the start of the 2021 season and his contract will run initially for four years.

Măcelaru, who played in the first-violin section of the Houston Symphony for two seasons, was the youngest concertmaster in the history of the Miami Symphony Orchestra and made his Carnegie Hall debut with that orchestra at the age of 19. As a conductor he attracted attention in 2012 when he stepped in for Pierre Boulez with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. That same year, he received the 'Solti Emerging Conductor Award' for young conductors, followed in 2014 by the 'Solti



Cristian Măcelaru: joins Orchestra National de France

Conducting Award'. Since then, he has performed with many of the world's leading orchestras. He made his Proms debut this summer with the BBC SO.

On record, he can be heard accompanying violin concertos by Aaron Jay Kernis and James Newton Howard (for James Ehnes), by Wynton Marsalis (for Nicola Benedetti) and by Prokofiev (for Franziska Pietsch), as well as conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra in Michael Torke's *Unconquered*.

ONE TO WATCH

Julia Sitkovetsky Soprano

Born into a musical family - her father was the violinist and conductor Dmitry Sitkovetsky - the young British-American soprano Julia Sitkovetsky made her operatic debut at the age of 16, as an understudy in the role of Flora in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* at Glyndebourne. Her operatic career has since flourished. A lyric/dramatic coloratura soprano of enormous expressive range, she has appeared at the Semperoper Dresden, Deutsche Oper am Rhein and Staatsoper Hannover, and made her debut as the Queen of the Night in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at Scottish Opera.

She has also appeared in recital at London's Wigmore Hall with the pianists Iain Burnside and Roger Vignoles. She has made her debut recording with Vignoles, of Rachmaninov songs for Hyperion, which will be issued next year. Roger Vignoles has performed with Sitkovetsky for some years, which has given the pianist a unique vantage point on her qualities. He writes: 'Julia Sitkovetsky is that rare phenomenon, a Queen of the Night with a dark middle and lower register, which makes her ideal for a composer like



Rachmaninov. Having known her since she was very young, it has been a thrill to observe her development into a mature artist. Her sheer poise and expressiveness is remarkable in one of her years, and one senses when accompanying her that this repertoire really is in her blood.' With such a strong advocacy, her Rachmaninov recording should be worth seeking out.

GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

Gramophone's podcast series continues, featuring interviews with Julian Lloyd Webber, who talks to Martin Cullingford about why Elgar's Cello Concerto continues to resonate so deeply with audiences 100 years after its first performance; Jonathan Biss, who has just completed his traversal of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas, recording them all over a nine-year period; Lars Vogt, who, with James Jolly, explores Brahms's First Piano Concerto and explains his decision to direct the concerto from the keyboard; and the Music Director of The Tallis Scholars, Peter Phillips, who talks about his latest album in his Josquin series.



Lars Vogt features on *Gramophone's* podcast series

YouTube

Rob Cowan has produced a number of compelling videos for *Gramophone's* YouTube channel exploring his particular musical passions and favourite recordings. Subscribe to our YouTube channel to enjoy!

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Missa brevis

David Threasher charts the evolution of this shortened form of the Mass

As long ago as the late 15th century, less expansive settings of the Ordinary of the Mass were being designated *Missa brevis*. Later, in the 17th and 18th centuries, ways were found to keep Mass-settings short. In this vein, Bach composed a quartet of 'Lutheran Masses' (BWV233-236) in which only the *Kyrie* and *Gloria* were treated, each lasting around 20 minutes. Even the grand, ornate B minor Mass started out this way before being expanded into a *Missa tota* in the last years of Bach's life.

Meanwhile, in Catholic areas of Europe, where complete settings of the Ordinary were needed on a regular basis, other techniques were required to prevent treatments of the wordy text from dragging. Mozart reported to his friend and mentor Padre Martini in 1776 that, as decreed by the hated Archbishop Colloredo, 'a Mass with the whole *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, the Epistle sonata, the Offertory or Motet, the *Sanctus* and the *Agnus Dei*, must not last longer than three quarters of an hour. This applies even to the most Solemn Mass said by the Archbishop himself. So you see that special study is required for this kind of composition. At the same time, the Mass must have all the instruments – trumpets, drums and so forth.'

Some of Mozart's string of *Missae breves* stopped short of this specified instrumentation: among a considerable handful, the infectiously melodic Mass in F major, K192 (1774) is scored in its original version for chorus, soloists and the 'Salzburg church trio' of pairs of violins with basso continuo. Colloredo specified that

corners were not to be cut via polytextuality, in which different lines of text are sung simultaneously, although this was often honoured more in the breach. Some of Haydn's earliest Masses, including the *Missa Rorate coeli desuper*, HobXXII:3 (c1750) rattle through the *Credo* by having each of the four choral voices start simultaneously at a different point in the long text. Such compact works would be pressed into use on those Sundays where a specific celebration was not required, while the major festivals would, of course, call for the grander *Missa solennis*.

One scholar made an arbitrary division between *Missae breves* and longer forms at 570 bars. This partition may be most charitably considered an extremely porous border but the same scholar went on to identify certain features – polytextuality, no fugues, few solos, simple style and scoring, *Kyrie* and *Gloria* as single movements – as trademarks of the *Missa brevis*. Conversely, *Missae solennes* would feature subdivisions of the longer texts, virtuoso arias and richer scoring to justify their greater length.

The term *Missa brevis*, like so many, ceased to be quite so useful in the 19th century but enjoyed a resurgence in the 20th, often denoting a compact Mass with or without organ accompaniment. Examples include *Missae breves* by Britten (1959) and Bernstein (1989) – both omitting the *Credo* – as well as composers ranging in style and outlook from Kodály (1942), Walton (1966) and Mathias (1973 – these last two in English for Anglican use) to Brian Ferneyhough (1969) and, in our own century, Krzysztof Penderecki (2013).

ARTISTS & their INSTRUMENTS

Percussionist *Alasdair Malloy* on his 25-year-old glass harmonica

“I first became aware of the glass harmonica as a youngster when I read about it in a musical dictionary. I remember learning that Mozart and Beethoven had written for it, and being fascinated by the concept of rotating glass bowls, but what stayed with me was the last sentence of the entry – 'Now obsolete'.

As the BBC Concert Orchestra's Principal Percussionist, I do a lot of film music. Thirty years ago I had to play a melody on some wine glasses, and found that I could join the notes up into a phrase. After that, I got an instrument put together for me. People would ask, 'Is that what Benjamin Franklin invented?' and I'd say, 'No, it's obsolete!' Then, 26 years ago, I heard of Sascha Reckert, who'd made his own glass harmonica. I flew to Germany to meet him and commissioned him to make one for me.

It took him a year. He was aghast when I told him I wanted it to be at contemporary pitch but, while I'm respectful of the instrument's



heritage, I wanted to move things forward. Luckily, he could still use his wooden moulds because, while their size has a certain bearing on pitch, there are other factors too: grinding

the rim of the glass bowl will raise the pitch, while grinding the bowl itself will lower it.

I can play from the F below middle C to three octaves above that. The bowls fit the exact span of my fingers, and the stool is upholstered to my unique point of balance. I use pedals to control the speed of rotation, and I need water on my fingers and all over the bowls in order to make them speak.

It's the only instrument where the vibrations are directly created and sustained by touch, and I love that connection – it's a living sound. It can emulate a voice, a cello, an organ ... composers will sometimes use just a single note from me because it says such a lot. George Benjamin wrote a part for me in *Written on Skin*, and at Kew Gardens recently, I was given complete freedom to add to Nico Muhly's pre-recorded soundscape. Quite simply, there's no other instrument like it.”

Visit alasdairmalloy.com for more information

ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1908

Home Parco della Musica, Rome

Music Director Sir Antonio Pappano (since 2002)

Honorary Conductor Yuri Temirkanov

What a difference a multi-million euro architectural marvel makes. Before Renzo Piano's Parco della Musica opened, the remit of Italy's five-century-old National Academy of Saint Cecilia had all the lucidity of a Dan Brown novel (and the same tangled links to the papacy). Now, with the help of Piano's building, Romans can literally see this once-elusive organisation for what it is: a research and education institution, a museum and a concert society with Italy's most distinguished symphony orchestra at its heart.

That orchestra sounded for the first time in 1908, four years before Bernardino Molinari began a 32-year stint as its first Music Director. The 20th century was a tough one for the Cecilians. Some historians point to the dichotomy of a symphony orchestra in opera-oriented Italy but the reality was probably more one of insufficient and inconsistent talent on the podium. After two decades of crisis, things began to right themselves with the arrival of Giuseppe Sinopoli as the orchestra's fifth Music Director in 1983.

Daniele Gatti and Myung-Whun Chung were among Sinopoli's successors and each prioritised technique: Gatti obsessing over the beauty of the string sound and Chung honing ensemble in an orchestra that could sound like an assemblage of soloists. Three years after the Parco della Musica flung open its glass doors in 2002, Antonio Pappano arrived as Music Director.



The orchestra 'fell in love with him immediately' according to Artistic Administrator Mauro Bucearelli.

Pappano is credited with restoring the ensemble's pride while massaging its naturally Italian operatic inclinations cultivated in a string of recordings under Tullio Serafin, Francesco Molinari-Pradelli and others (chiefly vehicles for the likes of Carlo Bergonzi and Renata Tebaldi). Pappano has made the Santa Cecilia a prolific recording orchestra again, feeding it repertoire from Saint-Saëns to Mahler since 2008 when it announced its return to the catalogue with *Madama Butterfly* starring Angela Gheorghiu and Jonas Kaufmann. *Aida*, made under studio conditions in 2015, showed how adept its cherry-wood hall is at cradling large groups of instruments and voices with warmth and focus.

Opera – or singing at least – is part of everything this orchestra does, according to Pappano (Principal Guest Conductor, the opera-trained Mikko Franck, would surely concur). 'It's all to do with songfulness, with clarity and with thrust,' Pappano told *Gramophone* in 2011. But he has also referred to its 'hot-blooded Italian' side, a characteristic that might have lubricated a strong relationship with Leonard Bernstein (Honorary Conductor from 1983 to 1990). It certainly feels that way from 2018's Warner Classics recording of Bernstein's three symphonies. **Andrew Mellor**

IN THE STUDIO

● Trumpeter, *Gramophone* contributor and RAM Principal **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood** and composer **Thomas Oehler** have conceived a trumpet sonata 'after Richard Strauss' drawn from the composer's original oeuvre (such as the early violin sonata, and referencing and refashioning familiar and less familiar Strauss instrumental and vocal works), alongside adapted and composed material. Partnered by the pianist **Chiyan Wong**, the sonata was recorded in April at St George's, Bristol, and will appear on a February release from Linn entitled 'Richard Strauss and The Viennese Trumpet'.

● Good news for fans of the piano music of Charles-Valentin Alkan played by **Mark Viner** (whose new recording of the Op 31 Préludes is reviewed on page 90): his new recording for Piano Classics (as part of the label's complete Alkan piano music) of the Grand Sonata *Les quatre âges* and Op 37 Marches is in the can and is due for release in late spring.

● Hyperion continues its Vaughan Williams symphony cycle with the Fifth. **Martyn Brabbins** conducts the BBC SO, and the couplings are *England, My England* (with the BBC Symphony Chorus and the

baritone **Roderick Williams**) and three unpublished works for orchestra and chorus, *Ward the Pirate*, *Tarry Trousers* and *The Carter*. It was recorded in November, and is due out in November 2020.

● **Paul Merkelo**, celebrating his 25th season as solo trumpet with the Montreal SO, recorded an album in June for Sony Classical. It took place in Moscow with the Russian National Orchestra under Hans Graf, and repertoire includes concertos by Weinberg and Arutiunian, and a new arrangement of the Shostakovich Concerto No 1 for Trumpet, Piano and String Orchestra. Expect the release next autumn.

● The cellist **Robin Michael** and pianist **Daniel Tong** have recorded Beethoven's complete works for cello and piano on period instruments for Resonus Classics. A February release is planned.

● Another Hyperion project, due in the studio soon and released in October, will see pianist **Pavel Kolesnikov** record Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. He will play them live next year in various European venues for a new dance work by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Rosas.

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FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson on the return of one of London's classiest bands




What's in a name? Plenty. The revival of the Sinfonia of London in such spectacular style with John Wilson's glorious Chandos recording of the Korngold Symphony (10/19) is probably even more of a nostalgic occasion for me than it has been for Wilson. The name retained a kind of mystique for me throughout childhood.

I wondered about this orchestra whose name didn't conform to the familiar 'philharmonic' or 'symphony' branding, whose presence on the credits on film after film during the 1950s and '60s intrigued me. Why did they never give concerts? Who were the players?

There was something else, too. As a young film and classical music enthusiast I grew up thinking that the scores performed by a named orchestra had a certain cachet. At school we had been shown Sir Alexander Korda's adaptation of H G Wells's *Things to Come* and the three names on the music credit – Sir Arthur Bliss, the London Symphony Orchestra and Muir Mathieson (Korda's Scottish music director) – seemed to me so grand a triumvirate for a mere movie. It hadn't occurred to me then that the pursuit of lucrative 'commercial' work might later come to be regarded as outside or even beneath the remit of the great symphony orchestras, that there might even be something of a stigma associated with such work. The formation of the Sinfonia of London in 1955 was in some small way an attempt both to circumvent that stigma and give musicians from an orchestra like the LSO a free rein in pursuing those lucrative contracts. It seems so ironic now that the advent of *Star Wars* (1977) and the LSO's much-trumpeted involvement in it would prove to be such a badge of honour for the orchestra the world over.


I mentioned Muir Mathieson earlier. It cannot be underestimated what he did to alleviate the stigma of commercialism and involve the great and the good of music in the creative process of making movies. That he succeeded in luring the most eminent British composers of the day – Walton, Vaughan Williams, Addinsell, Alwyn, Bax – to the silver screen speaks volumes. His was the name most familiar to me from childhood and imagine my thrill as a teenager in finding him at the helm of the Ernest Read Orchestra where I briefly wreaked havoc as a percussion player. (I still recall a performance of Elgar's *Cockaigne* Overture where I enthusiastically took charge of the bass-drum part. During the rehearsal Mathieson called out to me: 'Mr bass drum – I relish your vigour but be aware that we need the instrument intact for the performance'. His words resonate still.)

But resonating now is the string sound so familiar from John Wilson's Hollywood escapades and brought to bear now on the late, late romantic effusions of Korngold's Symphony in F sharp. Leaders and section principals rub shoulders in the reformed Sinfonia of London but it is the familiarity of the relationships within the orchestra and with their conductor that enables such freedom and unity of expression. The performance has a reach and imperative and effulgence that augurs well for when they next sit down together. Oh, and I too cherish Barbirolli's disc of 'English String Music' with unreasonable fervour. 

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Carnegie Hall: Horowitz receives a standing ovation on his triumphant return to the stage in 1965, after a 12-year absence



HOROWITZ

our contemporary

Michelle Assay celebrates the life and career of the controversial American pianist 30 years after his death – and makes a case for his relevance today

King of kings', 'Titan of the piano', 'The Ukrainian tiger who burnt bright' ... Did any pianist ever attract more adulatory labels than Vladimir Horowitz? I myself felt their power when I first fell in love with his playing through the 1985 documentary film *Vladimir Horowitz: The Last Romantic*. At the time, I was a child in a country where classical music was banned (even films and recordings were smuggled in only at the risk of a jail sentence); it was the sense of abandon and joy that Horowitz conveyed that made me crave a lifelong connection with the piano.

Now, 30 years after his death, he is still regarded by many living pianists as 'one of their gods', as Nelson Goerner puts it to me. For him, too, an encounter with Horowitz accelerated his own progress. Yet such adulation can be a double-edged sword, since it generates resistance and an urge to find faults, as well as hyperbolic expectations, which in the case of Horowitz placed intolerable pressure on his already fragile mental health (which led to four periods of absence from the stage). In any case, testimonies from some of today's leading pianists

and two of his pupils, as well as relistening to many hours of his recordings, have motivated me to propose a new label: 'Horowitz – our contemporary', inspired by Jan Kott's seminal book *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1961). I am not claiming that Horowitz was a Shakespeare of the piano – though I sometimes wonder how that label escaped his worshippers – but just that as Shakespeare's themes have contemporary resonances that remain compelling, so do Horowitz's life and career.

Fame and well-being, for example. His name appears in a recent article in *The American Journal of Psychiatry* as an example of a celebrity who was treated 'successfully' with electroconvulsive therapy. Music and physical well-being, too, albeit that here the link is mainly through his pupils. I interview Byron Janis and Gary Graffman, both of whom studied with Horowitz, and each recounts touching stories of their battles with physical obstacles during their careers as concert pianists. Janis, in particular, has since been doing remarkable work for musicians with arthritis.

Delving into Horowitz's official and unofficial biographies reveals further life issues – closet homosexuality and even a potential feminist perspective

if we think of his wife Wanda (née Toscanini) caught between dominating male musical personalities. Nationalism forces its way into the picture too. Ukraine has been active in reclaiming its Kiev-born son, even if in 1903, the year of his birth, an independent Ukraine did not exist and Horowitz, like Tchaikovsky and Nikolai Gogol, most probably had a pan-Slavic or even Russian identity; he certainly called Russia the country of his birth in interviews around the time of his historic 1986 return visit to Moscow. Yet I myself used to refer to him as one reason why I had chosen to study at the Kiev Conservatoire. Horowitz was a student there only until the age of 16 or 17. Nevertheless, nowadays Kiev prides itself in hosting an international piano competition in his memory. I mischievously asked Yuri Zilberman – the man behind the Kiev Horowitz foundation and an active Horowitzologist and adulator – about David Dubal's claim that Horowitz had stressed in his will that he wanted no

competition in his name. The defence was not only that Dubal had been a member of the jury but also that the title of the competition says 'in the memory of', and hence

Horowitz would have approved. Who knows? In 2020, the competition will celebrate 25 years since its inception.

Even before he won the third prize in the junior section of the 1997 competition, Sasha Grynyuk was an admirer of Horowitz, thanks to listening to recordings collected by his brother, Alexei, also a pianist and winner at the next competition (1999). Sasha remembers how much the competition meant to him: 'not so much for the results but for the whole atmosphere of somehow being connected with Horowitz's persona – having his portrait above the piano, the medal with his profile on it, and so on'.

The insatiable appetite of the media has hardly diminished since Horowitz's death in 1989. Did he himself enjoy the attention lavished on him? Yes, and no. It meant that he could ask for the highest fees and make diva-ish demands. The media and Harold Schonberg's biography (1992) reported at length on his foibles when it came to travel, hotel rooms (with video collections to keep him amused) and diet (not least during his tour to Russia, when a 'team asparagus' was assigned to meet his vegetable requirements). But the attention could be merciless. A 1977 interview is painful to watch not just because

Just as William Shakespeare's themes have contemporary resonances that remain compelling, so do Horowitz's life and career

Horowitz appears to be heavily medicated, his speech more slurred than it would be even just before his death, but mainly for the puppetmaster attitude of the interviewer, forcing him to play *The Stars and Stripes Forever* even when he protests that he can't remember it. Did the media have a role in his career breaks? Probably so – alongside other factors such as the loss of his daughter, Sonia (1934-75). In any case, the media certainly benefited from his unpredictability. The historic Carnegie Hall return concert of 1965, for instance, as moving and powerful as it was, was a carefully calculated commercial operation, playing to the hunger for the legendary artist whose every concert might be his last. Horowitz himself would often play along and add to his many titles: 'priest of art' (in an interview with Norman Pellegrini for his return to Chicago in 1986) or 'ambassador of peace' (on the occasion of his historic return to Russia, also in 1986).

He was, at least on the surface, a natural showman and entertainer. These are now artistic qualities sought after by programmers of major concert and opera houses desperately seeking to attract a diverse audience by supposedly democratising art music. These qualities as found in Horowitz have provoked many critical debates. Shortly after the pianist's death, Joseph Horowitz (no relation) scorned him for being 'attuned to people: players, listeners, technicians, music-businessmen'.



'Titan of the piano': Horowitz, pictured in the 1930s

His article 'The Transformations of Horowitz' (1990) was an attempt to critique one-sidedly positive views; but its correctives were themselves just as one-sided. Its reference to the 1987 documentary *Horowitz Plays Mozart* was intended to illustrate and deride the pianist's flamboyance, but in fact its account of his behaviour in the film serves only to bring out the charm of a self-mocking old man (Horowitz died two years later). The film contains a poetic interpretation of the A major Piano Concerto, K488, and has some fascinating remarks from a master who has no need for self-censorship: 'Today there is a crisis of composers not of pianists,' and, 'I love that [Mozart] more than any other music. I understand this music not in classic way but completely free ... but in good taste. Casals told me you must play Mozart like Chopin and Chopin like Mozart.'

Since then, Joseph Horowitz has made some concessions (in his 2010 article 'Horowitz on Horowitz on Horowitz on Horowitz: A Recantation'), thanks to his son Bernie's adoration of the pianist. I wonder whether he has seen Richard Taruskin's 1993 article 'Why Do They All Hate Horowitz?' (reprinted in his book of collected polemics, *The Danger of Music*, 2010), which took aim not only at him but also at Michael Steinberg's entry for the pianist in the 1980 edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, with its harsh closing statement

A HOROWITZ TIMELINE

<p>1903 Born October 1 in Kiev to an upper-middle-class family: mother an amateur pianist, father an electrical engineer. Horowitz's sister, Regina (1900-84), would also become a prominent pianist.</p> <p>1912 Begins studies at Kiev Conservatoire with Vladimir Pukhalsky and Sergei Tarnowsky, and later with Felix Blumenfeld, whom Horowitz praised in particular. He did, however, admit to being more interested in composition at the time.</p> <p>1914 Plays for Scriabin in Kiev. According to Horowitz, Scriabin tells his mother that he will be a pianist but also insists that he should become a cultured person.</p> <p>1920 Graduates from Kiev Conservatoire.</p> <p>1921 Embarks on tours through Russia, supporting his family who lost their wealth after the revolution and war.</p> <p>1924 Gives series of highly successful recitals in Leningrad.</p> <p>1925 With his impresario Aleksandr Meerovich leaves Russia for Berlin.</p> <p>1925 Concerto debut on December 18 in Tchaikovsky's First with Berlin SO under Oskar Fried.</p> <p>1926 Debut recital on January 2 at Beethovensaal, Berlin. On January 20</p>	<p>steps in for indisposed Helene Zimmermann in Tchaikovsky's First Concerto under Eugen Pabst. The concert is a sensation with audience and critics. Successful concerts in Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland follow.</p> <p>1928 US debut on January 12 at Carnegie Hall, New York, performing Tchaikovsky's First Concerto under Sir Thomas Beecham.</p> <p>1933 Marries Wanda Toscanini, daughter of Arturo, on December 21 in Milan. Horowitz and Toscanini go on to perform regularly together, making recordings of Brahms's Second and Tchaikovsky's First.</p> <p>1936 Withdraws from the concert stage until 1938 – the first of four absences.</p> <p>1944 Becomes an American citizen.</p> <p>1953 After concert at Carnegie Hall on February 25 celebrating 25 years since US debut, withdraws again from public performance. After a period of almost complete isolation begins to make recordings once more.</p> <p>1957 January 16, Toscanini dies. Soon after, Horowitz's daughter, Sonia, is critically injured in a motorbike accident.</p> <p>1965 May 9 at Carnegie Hall: returns to concert platform after 12 years of absence.</p>	<p>1968 September 22: concert televised (by CBS) for the first time (recorded in Jan and Feb).</p> <p>1969 The third of his stage absences begins, this time lasting for five years.</p> <p>1974 Returns to public performance and starts US tour.</p> <p>1975 January 10: his daughter, Sonia (40), is found dead in Geneva.</p> <p>1982 Returns to Europe for the first time since Second World War with two concerts at Royal Festival Hall, London, in May.</p> <p>1983 Tours to Japan and gives two concerts in Tokyo. The tour is a failure and is harshly criticised. Horowitz enters his fourth period of silence.</p> <p>1985 Resurfaces with tours to Paris and Milan. Films <i>The Last Romantic</i> at his NYC home.</p> <p>1986 Historic return tour to the USSR after 61 years away from Russia. Gives concerts in Moscow and Leningrad and visits Scriabin's house.</p> <p>1987 Continues concerts in Europe, including return visit to Vienna after more than 50 years. Films <i>Horowitz Plays Mozart</i>.</p> <p>1989 Starts recording sessions in October for what would be his last disc. Dies on November 5, apparently of a heart attack. Buried in Toscanini family vault in Milan.</p>
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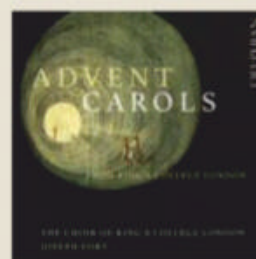
that Horowitz ‘illustrates that an astounding instrumental gift carries no guarantee about musical understanding’. Before his final comment, Steinberg, seeking to illustrate that Horowitz ‘conceives of interpretation not as the reification of the composer’s idea, but as an essentially independent activity’, singled out his take on Schumann’s ‘Träumerei’ from *Kinderszenen*, deploring the way ‘he places the high points anywhere except where Schumann placed them’. Taruskin batted back the ‘mean insult’, pointing out that if Steinberg was referring to the musical direction of the melody, all Horowitz does is to treat the longer note at the end of the crescendo arpeggio as the echo of the shorter preceding one, as if from a dream. Actually, Horowitz does much more with this deceptively simple piece. He constantly varies the texture and brings out inner voices at unexpected places; and, above all, he varies his interpretation from performance to performance. Steinberg’s 1980 *New Grove* entry was replaced in the 2001 edition by a text by Schonberg that goes to the opposite extreme, allowing scarcely a hint of negative comment.

Taruskin also took the opportunity to deride Tim Page, whose 1992 assessment (in the *New Republic*) of Horowitz’s pianism and in particular Schonberg’s biography provided him with another soft target. For Taruskin, Page’s subsequent toning down of his rhetoric was a victory and a result of his ‘exposure of [Page’s] pretension’. But Taruskin was overlooking two important factors. First of all, as Page himself tells me, he would have written his article differently today; not because of Taruskin, but because he is no longer a thirty-something-year-old establishing himself. Then there was the fatigue among some critics from constant exposure to Horowitz in his Americanised media image. Page’s article opens with the complaint that ‘everything Horowitz did was reported as news’. He was goaded by such gushing verbiage as this by Schonberg in the aftermath of Horowitz’s death: ‘When Vladimir Horowitz played, he generated electricity, thunder and lightning and displayed demonic technical control that always threatened to get out of hand but never did.’ Page still prefers other pianists in some of the repertoire for which Horowitz is revered; he has not recanted from his view that, ‘There are times when Horowitz pecks and pokes at the piano in a way that shatters melodies into what seem so many shards of glass.’ But he also revels, as he did in his original article, in Horowitz’s advocacy of Kabalevsky, the simplicity of his approach to Clementi, and his inimitable interpretation of Barber’s Piano Sonata.

Taruskin’s characteristically self-congratulatory postscript takes immense pride in thankful letters from Horowitz lovers such as Janis and Schonberg. Hardly objective testimony, it might be thought. I wonder how Taruskin would react to, say, Alfred Brendel’s objections (as reported to me) to Horowitz’s ‘exaggeration and crassness of expression’ or his ‘mannerism of starting a phrase with a bang and ending it with a whimper’. As Brendel observes, ‘There is the belief of some present-day listeners that his performance of the Liszt Sonata represents a reincarnation of Liszt’s spirit. After playing many of Liszt’s works and reading through the complete Liszt literature in German and English, I think otherwise.’

Horowitz’s 1977 account of the B minor Sonata, from his period of heavy medical sedation, is indeed splashy and not to all tastes. Nevertheless, Taruskin was surely right to view Steinberg’s objections in the broader context of the search for so-called authenticity, which had been gathering pace since the 1950s. Issues surrounding the sacredness of the musical text and the role of the performer as a mere transmitter of the composer’s supposed intentions remain central to the Horowitz controversy.

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Advent Carols from King’s College London The Choir of King’s College London / Joseph Fort

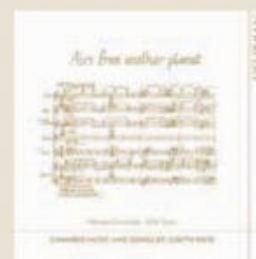
Every December, over a thousand people attend the Advent carol service in the Chapel of King’s College London, which is repeated over three nights to meet demand. This album offers a snapshot of one such service, with its characteristic mix of plainchant, seasonal hymns and polyphony old and new. The Great ‘O’ Antiphons (sung according to medieval Sarum practice) provide the backbone, pointing inexorably towards the Christmas birth. A brace of premiere recordings centres on composers with personal connections to King’s, and is complemented by current Professor of Composition George Benjamin’s rarely heard setting of a prophetic text after Isaiah, further intensifying the mood of heightened expectation proper to this very special season.



DCD34224

Music for Milan Cathedral: Werrecore – Josquin – Gaffurius – Weerbeke Siglo de Oro / Patrick Allies

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Milan Cathedral acted as a magnet to many of the finest composers of the time. Yet the Cathedral’s maestro di cappella for almost thirty years, Hermann Matthias Werrecore, is almost completely unknown to us today. Why was he forgotten? Did his Flemish origins mean he was never properly adopted by his Milanese congregation? Did his later reputation suffer from confusion with his countryman Matthias Le Maistre? Six of Werrecore’s surviving motets are presented here – the first time any of his sacred music has been recorded. They are heard alongside works by composers Werrecore knew, drawn mostly from the holdings of the Milan library during his tenure there. Siglo de Oro’s act of rediscovery reveals the exceptional quality of the music, and Patrick Allies directs them in performances of extraordinary flair.



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Airs from another Planet: chamber music and songs by Judith Weir Ailish Tynan *soprano*, Hebrides Ensemble

Storytelling and the gap between truth and fiction; invention and fantasy; the lessons that can be learned from other times and other cultures ... These are just some of the concerns that unite Judith Weir’s writing for voice and for instruments. Communication between generations, continents and women lies at the heart of *Nuits d’Afrique*, conceived as a companion piece to Ravel’s *Chansons madécasses*. Its dedicatee, Ailish Tynan, joins the outstanding Hebrides Ensemble players here and in *Really?*, a resonant sequence of folk-tales set in an idiosyncratic mixture of speech and song. The hymns of the medieval Rhenish saint, poet and composer Hildegard of Bingen underlie two recent chamber pieces, while the early *Airs from another Planet* imagines how Scottish folk music might sound after several generations of evolution in outer space.

‘The Master of the Queen’s Music’s witty, economical art comes over touchingly in this seven-work sample’
— Sunday Times, September 2019

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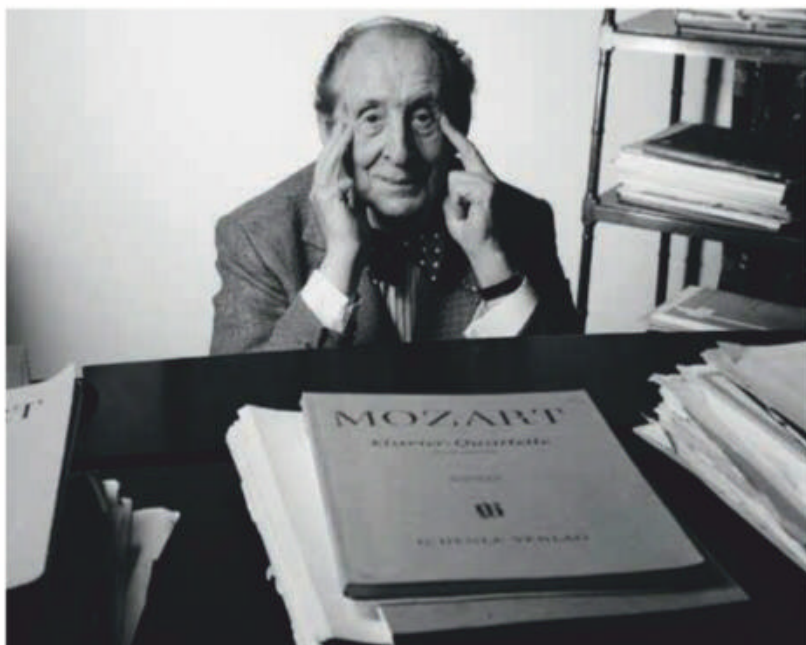
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There is no doubt that, as Benjamin Grosvenor tells me, 'Horowitz dared to dare. He had singular, preternatural technical resources and a freewheeling imagination that saw beyond any standard model.' Take, for instance, his enthralling 1947 recording of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Horowitz intervenes gleefully in the text, adding ornaments, reinforcements and acrobatic embellishments, some of which are enough to make any pianist-listener's eyes water. Is this irresistible (it is for me) or inexcusable? Norma Fisher explains it in a balanced way: 'My adoration of Horowitz goes back to my youth ... his extraordinary pianistic skills, always there as a shining example of the impossible being made possible! However, as my own "taste buds" and stylistic awareness developed, I started to wonder about the thinking behind this force of nature. My own concern for duty and responsibility to the score and spirit of the composer started to disturb my listening to him with ease, and on many occasions I would find myself offended by his impermeable subjectivity. With age and experience, and the best will in the world, I still find myself questioning his licence, and long for his phenomenal pianism to be more deferential.' Yet she feels moved to add: 'As artists, we are bound to be guided by our soul, and there is no question as to the beauty of his. I'd just like a little more "head ruling heart"!'

That would certainly not be a Horowitz motto, at least according to him: 'Mind and the intellect are the guide of the emotion but [they are] not enough. You're not a typewriting machine. You have to hear what the composer has to say. Intellect is the controller but not the guide; keep your feelings free.' Nor, it has to be said, was he ever in search of technical perfection. Graffman rightly remarks that in 'those days' wrong notes didn't matter as much as today. In *The Last Romantic*, Horowitz shouts: 'I don't want perfection! I am not Heifetz; I'm Horowitz.'

That these issues are very much alive and kicking is indicated by the Challenging Performance project (challengingperformance.com), which aims to free classical music from constraints of fidelity to the text, asking the pointed question: why, when modern Shakespeare productions can be so varied, are modern performances of classical music so constrained by the text? Just as theatre producers may legitimately employ new means in order to recreate something like Shakespeare's original shock value, so Horowitz surprises his



Horowitz at home in New York, just over a year before his death at 86

'He never did things just to be interesting ... he always had a profound reason. Horowitz was the poet of the keyboard' — Nelson Goerner

musical vision: even when we might not like what he does we're compelled to engage with it.'

And there, surely, is the key. For all his unpredictability moment to moment, and his evolution from decade to decade, Horowitz never leaves the listener indifferent. For Goerner, his interpretations of Schumann's *Kinderszenen* and *Humoresque* are examples of 'sky-high, incandescent music-making'. Indeed, his mercurial *Humoresque* has been praised even by those who are Horowitz sceptics (including Brendel). His instinctive volcanic

energy is as natural a fit for Schumann's mood swings as it is for Scriabin. For Charles Rosen, his range of affinities was actually limited to two styles: 'the way he played Scarlatti and the way he played

Scriabin'. Certainly, his performance of Scriabin's Ninth Sonata was invariably riveting, and that of the C sharp minor Étude on Scriabin's own piano and in the presence of the composer's daughter during his return trip to Russia could hardly be matched for emotional power. Horowitz always loved to retell the story of playing for Scriabin as a 10-year-old. Nor did he ever tire of praising Rachmaninov; for many his 1930 account of the Piano Concerto No 3 with Albert Coates is unsurpassed.

It's true that he sometimes, as Grosvenor puts it, 'seemed to venture outside the bounds of "good taste"'. But Grosvenor continues: 'The great performances would not have been possible if he'd subjected himself to the kind of self-policing that would have meant he never produced anything unpalatable.'

For Goerner, meanwhile, 'He never did things just to be interesting ... he always had a profound reason.' And he could be remarkably self-disciplined when he felt the music required it. His first recording of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata (1963) is one of the cleanest and most respectful accounts you could hope to hear. Nor does he distract from the seriousness of Schubert's B flat Sonata; he simply loves and cherishes the music but in his own personal way. As Hough says: 'Very



With conductor Carlo Maria Giulini in a still from the 1987 film *Horowitz Plays Mozart*

occasionally you sense his giving in to vulgarity, with a crude kind of showmanship. Sometimes his Chopin can be heavy-handed, not so much in tone but in conception. But then you hear a mazurka and think no one else played them so beautifully.' To this I'd add several nocturnes and certainly the Fourth Ballade.

How, then, do we strike a balance? Lydia Artymiw is surely close to the mark in her contribution to David Dubal's *Remembering Horowitz* (Schirmer, 2001): 'Horowitz's playing truly represented an aesthetic that predates commercial recording. Most pianists today are influenced by the microphone, whether or not they are recording. Their primary goal seems to be to produce a performance which could withstand multiple hearings. The Horowitz performance, on the other hand, was calculated for the moment.' And as Rosen, never likely to be an unqualified admirer, observes: 'What was unequalled about his playing was his intensity: he seemed to be playing not only with all he had but even to be forcing himself beyond his means.' Janis recalls the nervous energy in Horowitz's playing, which he finds rare among today's artists. Horowitz himself admitted that there was both 'devil and angel inside of me ... in order to protect what the composer wanted'. With age he mellowed, and the devil, as he confessed in *The Last Romantic*, gradually gave place to the angel. Is it perhaps the case that the 'wizard of virtuosity', as his contemporaries knew him, is for our age becoming, in Goerner's words, 'the poet of the keyboard'?

Where is the border between productive inspiration and harmful imitation? Janis remembers how hard it was for him to liberate himself from the influence of the master: 'His way of playing would get into my head.' It took Janis, he admits, three years to find his own voice. Horowitz had a peculiar physical approach to the keyboard, instantly recognisable visually: flat fingers, very low wrists and a curled fifth finger. Janis remembers that Horowitz tried this technique with him but it wouldn't work. Graffman recalls that some young pianists injured themselves trying to achieve the same level of technical brilliance, and Benno Moiseiwitsch blamed Horowitz for pianists' obsession with showing off their technique. Kenneth Hamilton, in a forthcoming article, remembers being swept away by Horowitz's 'cinematic sonorities and especially by the left-hand octaves and apocalyptic conclusion' of Liszt's *Vallée d'Obermann*, and recalls that, 'Trying to imitate Horowitz's cyclopean clash-of-the-titans sonority at the opening of Samuel Barber's piano sonata, I simply ended up "flailing around" ... thumping mercilessly until I noticed my teacher's horrified disapproval.'

For Hough, the problem lies more in selective hearing: 'Pianists tried to imitate him by playing loud and fast, missing the point that his tempi were often slower than others and his *pianissimos* were as ravishing as can be imagined. This is the memory I have from the one concert I heard him play live – a whisper of one leaf.'

This brings us to questions of voicing and tone. For Graffman, as for many

others, 'Horowitz was the master of colours,' and he remembers how surprised he was when after his first session with Horowitz he was sent home with LPs of Tchaikovsky's opera *The Queen of Spades* and the words, 'If you know how to sing a phrase you can also play it.' Graffman carried over such experiences into his own pedagogy (his pupils at the Curtis Institute of Music have included Lang Lang and Yuja Wang). 'A bass could be cellos but could also be bassoons; these are two different colours to be reproduced on the piano,' says Graffman. For Goerner, a key element of the singing quality was Horowitz's imaginative and unorthodox pedalling: 'He had a great way of blending sound and timbre, harmonies and colours. He could sing on the piano as if the piano had lungs.'

Horowitz also made very exacting demands on his piano technicians. Franz Mohr, who in 1965 replaced Horowitz's first tuner, Bill Hupfer, recalls many stories of Horowitz's caprices, regarding such issues as the height of the piano stool, the piano not being straight and the placement of the instrument on the platform. Janis tells me that Horowitz always checked the weather forecast, as he believed it had an effect on the sound in the hall. There is some inconsistency in Mohr's account when it comes to Horowitz's piano. He admits that it was adjusted to what Horowitz liked (in terms of sound), with a very responsive action, minimum resistance to the fingers and a strong uplift back to the rest position. Yet at the same time he claims there was 'nothing special about the Horowitz piano'. The Steinway Model D CD 503, a gift from the Steinway family to Horowitz, was the instrument he favoured on most concert stages. It was unique, according to Mohr, but only in the way that any Steinway piano is. Mohr observes that Horowitz's taste changed over the years and that the 'very super brilliant sound – which at one point he liked very much – gave way to a much more mellow sound'. Was it that Horowitz had been intuitively opting for

such brightness given the limitations of recording technique in the early days, and took a while to adjust to improvements in clarity? Certainly the sound quality on his pre-1960s recordings is generally far less glassy than, say, the 1974 Beethoven *Appassionata*, which borders on ugliness.

With such a vast Horowitz discography and filmography, the time is surely ripe for a new critical biography that could put old disputes in their place and concentrate on Horowitz's legacy for the 21st century. There have been some recent attempts at scholarly reassessment in Russian, but with a heavy emphasis on Horowitz's years in Russia, and predominantly authored by Zilberman, who rarely manages to keep hero worship at bay. A multidisciplinary research project called 'In Search of the Horowitz Factor', whose goal was to use AI to analyse expressive music performance, chose him as its central case study (the results were published in *AI Magazine* in 2003 – Vol 24, No 3 – and can be downloaded online). Still, I suspect the debate between adorers and detractors will rumble on. In this way, as in so many others, Horowitz seems destined to remain 'our contemporary' for many years to come. **G**

HOROWITZ ON RECORD

Five must-have Horowitz recordings



Mussorgsky
Pictures at an Exhibition
Horowitz *pf*
RCA Victor Gold Seal
(7/60)^R



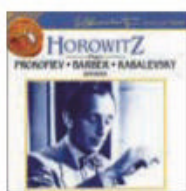
'Horowitz plays
Scarlatti'
Horowitz *pf*
Sony Classical
(8/65)^R



Rachmaninov Piano Concerto
No 3 Liszt Paganini Etude No 5
Horowitz *pf* LSO / Albert Coates
Naxos
(6/32)^R



'Horowitz plays
Scriabin'
Horowitz *pf*
Sony Classical
(5/15)



Prokofiev. Barber. Kabalevsky
Piano Sonatas
Horowitz *pf*
RCA Victor Gold Seal
(6/92)

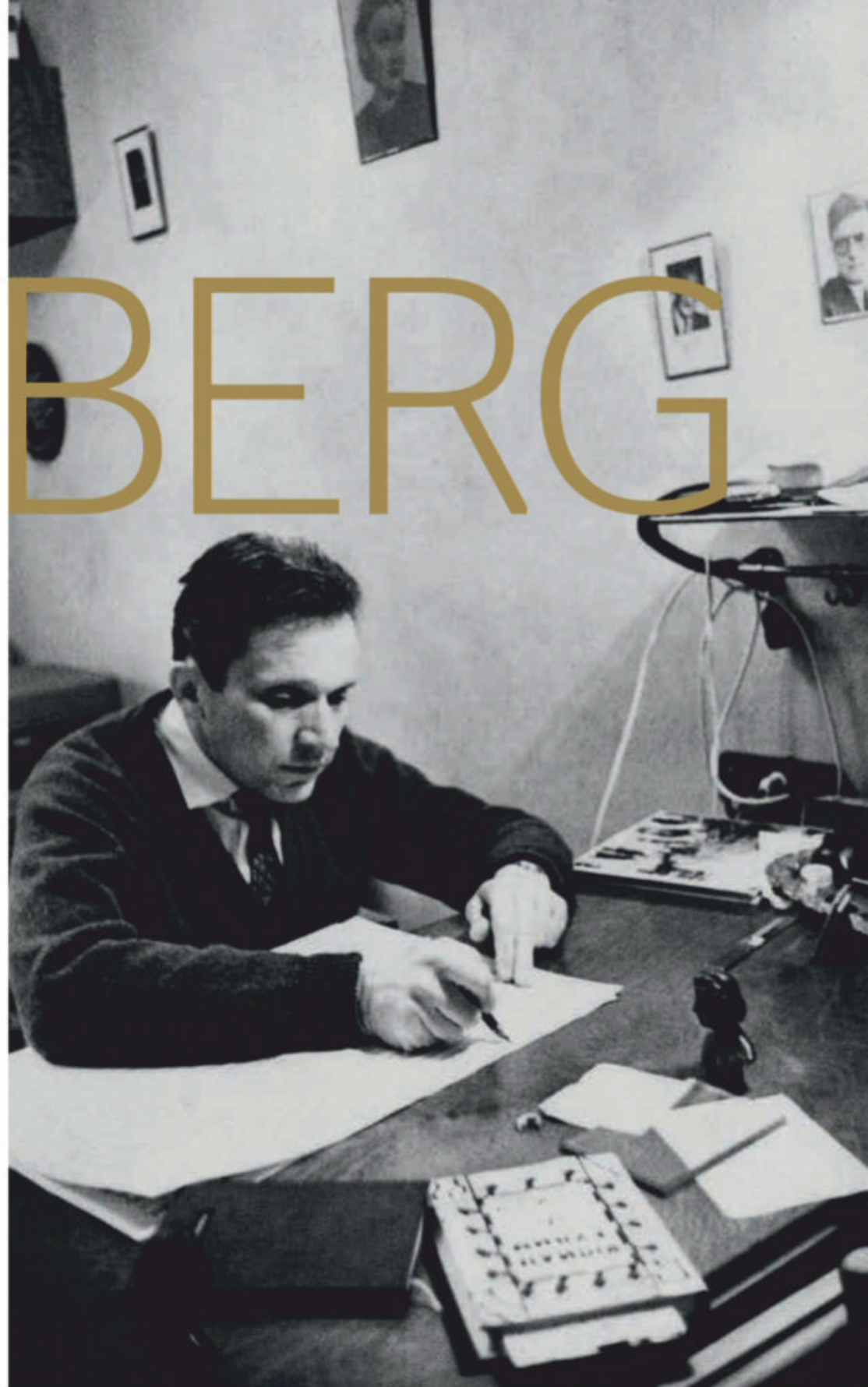
Listening to WEINBERG

To mark Mieczysław Weinberg's centenary, **David Fanning** explores the ever-growing catalogue of the Russian composer's extraordinary and underappreciated music

Twenty-five years ago, bedridden, with only 14 months to live, Weinberg celebrated his 75th birthday. The Russian musical world, however, did not. Concert life in post-Soviet Russia was in poor shape – one wry observer commented that ‘the concert halls were empty and porn cinemas full’. Even before the death of Shostakovich in 1975, concert-goers’ tastes had been changing, as audiences gradually became aware of the ‘underground’ music of a younger generation (Schnittke, Denisov, Sofia Gubaidulina and others), leaving the darkly unflamboyant, resolutely humanist utterances of late-period Shostakovich and his closest musical friend with an aura of *déjà entendu*.

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-96) lived just long enough to witness the beginnings of a new wave of interest. A series of CDs on Olympia began to be released in the 1990s, and his friend Tommy Persson (the Swedish judge who had brought medicines from the West which almost certainly gave the composer a few extra years of life) was able to present Weinberg with the third and fourth of those issues, containing suites from the ballet *The Golden Key* and the Piano Quintet and Twelfth String Quartet. The first of the series – a 1994 reissue of Symphonies No 6 and 10 recorded in the 1970s – contained an essay by Persson's friend the broadcaster and documentary maker Per Skans, who was collecting materials towards a life-and-works study up to his death in 2007. Skans went straight to the point, describing Weinberg's neglect as ‘scandalous’. How amazed he and the composer would have been at the plethora of recordings now available in this centenary year; and how bittersweetly gratifying for Persson to realise that his unsung initiative in underwriting several of the 17 Olympia Weinberg CDs that appeared between 1994 and 2000 not only kept the music alive for specialist collectors but touched off what has been described in Russia as the ‘Weinberg boom’. Since 2006 there have been five international conferences, books in Russian, Polish, English and German, and countless performances, not least a belated triple debut at this year's BBC Proms (the Cello Concerto, the Third Symphony and String Quartet No 7).

Not that Weinberg had been obscure in his lifetime. His dramatic life story was no secret. He had grown up in Warsaw, had two narrow escapes from German invasions, and finally settled in Moscow from September 1943. There he gained in Shostakovich a close musical friend and indefatigable supporter. The first five Moscow years were conspicuously successful.



Weinberg in 1962, with Shostakovich among the portraits on the wall in his study

Then the ‘anti-formalism’ and ‘anti-cosmopolitan’ campaigns beginning in 1948 put the brakes on, and after five years of being tailed by the secret police Weinberg was briefly incarcerated in the Lubyanka and Butyrka prisons. Following a steady recovery, in the 1960s (his ‘starry years’, as he described them) he was championed by the likes of Kondrashin, Rudolf Barshai, Mstislav Rostropovich, Emil Gilels, Leonid Kogan, the Borodin Quartet and Kurt Sanderling, and later on by Vladimir Fedoseyev. Even so, his Polish-Jewish background and his reluctance to assume official positions or to take on teaching meant that his music was never top-priority export material. Avid collectors in the West could have found his Fourth Symphony, Violin Concerto and Trumpet Concerto on EMI LPs under the licence agreement with Melodiya in the 1970s, and dribs and drabs had come through earlier than that on the Westminster and Monitor labels. Mail order outlets and (for British enthusiasts like myself) Collet's bookshop in London's Charing Cross Road brought occasional Melodiya treats, stimulating but hardly satisfying the appetite.

This may be the place to say that Melodiya's recent survey of selected Weinberg chamber recordings from the Soviet era

is both eminently collectable and something of a missed opportunity. Although there are treasures (Alexander Brusilovsky in the Second Solo Violin Sonata; Fyodor Druzhinin in the First Solo Viola Sonata; Weinberg accompanying his two cello sonatas; Timofey Dokshitser in the Trumpet Concerto), the three discs could comfortably have been accommodated on two; alternatively, the extra space could have been given over to Weinberg's own superb account of his Piano Quintet with the Borodin Quartet and, say, Gilels's superb reading of the Fourth Piano Sonata.

For all the sterling work of the Olympia pioneers (Murray McLachlan in the six piano sonatas, Yosif Feigelson in the solo cello works, the young Dominant and Gothenburg quartets in some of the string quartets, Thord Svedlund conducting the Second Symphony and three of the chamber symphonies), it was a second wave of champions that put Weinberg indelibly on the map. The Danel Quartet began their Weinberg journey in the same year that Olympia kicked off its recorded series, leading to six CPO CDs (released as a set in 2014) of the complete 17 quartets (1937-86). David Pountney took the bold decision to mount Weinberg's first opera, the Auschwitz-based *The Passenger* (1967-68), in its first ever staged production, in Bregenz in July 2010. Gidon Kremer put his own services and those of his hand-picked Kremerata Baltica behind an ongoing series of performances and recordings. Other doughty advocates feature in the course of this survey.

Virtually all the genres Weinberg worked in have now been covered (see Claude Torres's comprehensive and regularly updated online discography at musiques-regeneres.fr/Vainberg/WeinbergDiscographie.html). Even the 70 or so films for which he provided scores are almost all traceable online; the Palme d'Or-winning *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) is on DVD, and subtitled versions of the three Soviet Winnie-the-Pooh (*Vinni-Pukh*) cartoons he scored – their charming music as familiar to Russians as that of any Walt Disney cartoon to Westerners – can be found at a few keystrokes. I shall come on to the remaining gaps in my conclusion. The only other necessary preliminary is a declaration of interest, since a number of the CDs I shall mention contain my own booklet essays or reflect some level of consultation with me. I won't let that sway my judgement, though I cannot promise to have heard every single available version of the more frequently recorded works.

CHAMBER MUSIC

There are good reasons for beginning a survey with the chamber music. It was in the string quartet that the young Weinberg first made his mark. He composed six by the age of 26, with no duds (as the Danel Quartet's complete cycles this year in Manchester, Washington DC, Hamburg and Amsterdam have amply proved). It is here that his personal voice is revealed in its most developed form: its blend of stoical lyricism, defiance, painful intimacy, subtle shades of Jewish klezmer idiom and a willingness to experiment (to a Bartókian level, at least). And it's here that the relationship with Shostakovich is most apparent, with a mutual influence flowing between Weinberg and his great mentor and friend. The Danel's six discs for CPO are an obvious recommendation, for the excitement of their pioneering zeal as much as for their top-notch performance values, though the Silesian Quartet's cycle on Accord, comprising Quartets Nos 7 to 13 at the time of writing, offers a scarcely less distinguished alternative. In his last decade, Weinberg revised and recast the Second, Third and Fifth Quartets as his first three chamber symphonies, the first two of which won him his only USSR State Prize (1990). It seems that no one realised their origins,

but instead they were taken for bona fide late masterpieces, which must have been a source of some wry amusement for him. The Kremerata Baltica recordings of all four chamber symphonies are an obvious choice (coupled with an arrangement of the Piano Quintet for piano, strings orchestra and percussion), though personally I could have done without the arrangement, convincing though it is, because that would have allowed room for the first movement repeat in the Second Chamber Symphony, which is, after all, one of Weinberg's most neoclassical works. Of the various rival versions, I warm especially to the recent issue on Naxos of Nos 1 and 3 from the East-West Chamber Orchestra (reviewed next issue).

Given its memorable ideas, confident working out and quota of surprises (including a rumbustious Irish-sounding gigue in the last movement), it is natural that the Piano Quintet should be one of Weinberg's most frequently recorded works. I've heard most of the 11 recordings to date, and while none is less than respectable, it would be absurd not to nominate first and foremost the composer's own with the Borodin Quartet. He was shaping up for a career as concert pianist before the Nazi invasion of Poland, and only tuberculosis of the spine contracted in wartime compelled a shift in focus to composition. Thereafter, he still played to a high professional standard: hear him in the famous duet recording of Shostakovich's 10th Symphony with the composer, or the premiere of the latter's *Blok* Romances, Op 127, with Galina Vishnevskaya, David Oistrakh and Rostropovich, when he stood in for the indisposed Sviatoslav Richter. Apart from the sheer vitality of the Quintet performance, it's a valuable document of the kinds of liberty he took with his own text. So, too, is his accompaniment of Alla Vasilieva in his two Cello Sonatas (on the above-mentioned Melodiya chamber music set).

Join the lobby for Melodiya to make transfers of LPs of the Sixth Piano Sonata by Yablonskaya and/or Mdivani

Of Weinberg's 29 sonatas, the six for violin and piano have been particularly favoured – unsurprisingly, given their winning blend of substance and idiomatic writing. Of the three excellent sets that include all six, I favour Linus Roth and José Gallardo (Challenge Classics, 9/13). Kremer can be heard on a recent Deutsche Grammophon CD in the uncompromising Sixth Sonata, along with a terrific account of the Piano Trio, which has been as frequently recorded as the Quintet and is comparable in its passion, dramatic immediacy and command of large-scale structure. To hear Kremer with Martha Argerich in the Fifth Sonata (my personal favourite), you'll need Warner Classics' three-disc set of her live recordings from the 2014 Lugano Festival.

For sundry other chamber works, including the only current version of the Bassoon Sonata (on CPO, valuably coupled with other rarities and the top-notch Clarinet Sonata), pianist Elisaveta Blumina has been a prime mover (mainly for CPO, but also for Naxos). She herself has been working her way impressively through the solo piano sonatas. For comprehensive coverage of the piano works we have to thank Allison Brewster Franzetti; she alone has tackled the fiendishly difficult Partita, Op 54, for instance (on a four-disc set from Grand Piano). For the very finest in piano recordings, do seek out Gilels in the Fourth Sonata, and join the lobby for Melodiya to make transfers of LPs of the Sixth Piano Sonata (my personal

Did you know that Polish composer Mieczysław Weinberg was called “one of the most outstanding composers of today” by Shostakovich?



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favourite) by Oxana Yablonskaya and/or Marina Mdivani.

The one area in which Weinberg composed but Shostakovich did not is the solo string sonata; there are three for violin, four for viola, four for cello and a single one for double bass. They range from the wistfully lyrical First Sonata for cello, to the finger-torturing First Sonata for violin, to the remarkably sustained, almost symphonic Sonata for double bass. For the violin sonatas, Roth is again the obvious recommendation, conveniently available on a Challenge Classics disc (9/16); but for the viola

sonatas I'm torn between excellent versions by Julia Rebekka Adler (Neos, 6/10) and Viacheslav Dinerchtein (Solo Musica), and for the cello sonatas between Yosif Feigelson (reissued on Naxos, 11/97) and more recently Marina Tarasova (Northern Flowers). Much as I like Tarasova's heart-on-sleeve passion, Feigelson's two volumes also come with the highly experimental 24 Preludes and the alternative first movement of the Fourth Cello Sonata (for the revised version of the Second we can turn to Emil Rovner on Divox). Kremer's resourceful solo violin arrangements of the 24 Preludes can be heard not only on CD (Accentus, 6/19) but also on DVD (also Accentus) complemented by moody photographic images.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Weinberg's 22 symphonies (in addition to the four chamber symphonies) run through his entire career, from No 1 in 1942-43, dedicated to the Red Army (which he regarded as having saved him from the Nazis), to No 22, left unorchestrated at his death in 1996. The only significant chronological gap is between his Third of 1949 (the one much lauded at this year's Proms) and the Fourth of 1957 – the years of his tailing by the NKVD, persecution, imprisonment and recovery. The symphonies comprise three layers: straightforward non-programmatic instrumental works, symphonies with programmes and/or vocal or choral elements, and symphonies for strings.

Chandos and Naxos have been parcelling out the symphonies between them, with some additional sterling pioneer efforts from Toccata Classics (the plangent 21st, *Kaddish*, which is dedicated to the victims of the Warsaw ghetto – A/14; and the 22nd in a plausible orchestration by Kirill Umansky). Several of these are first and only recordings (Nos 1, 3, 8, 13, 16, 20, 22), and for others the only rival is long since out of print (Nos 18, 19). I have to single out No 13 on Naxos (12/18) for the sheer heroism of the Siberian State Symphony Orchestra in tackling one of Weinberg's most challenging scores. Kudos, too, to the Siberian Symphony Orchestra and Dmitry Vasiliev for giving us the *Six Ballet Scenes* (1973-75), also known as *Choreographic Symphony* (Toccata Classics; coupled with Symphony No 22), a piece that restores something of Weinberg's 1958 ballet *The White Chrysanthemum* (to a maudlin post-Hiroshima tale), which



Weinberg accompanies Oistrakh, Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich in the premiere of Shostakovich's Op 127 in Moscow, 1967

never made it to the stage and may never have been orchestrated in full (surviving only in piano score). The add-ons in the *Six Ballet Scenes* are horrendously difficult, but are of special interest for their unexpected intersections with the style of Schnittke.

Where choice exists, it's worth seeking out Kondrashin for Symphonies Nos 4, 5 and 6 (Nos 4 and 6 on Melodiya, 12/06), which are probably the first to go for anyway, since they represent Weinberg at an early peak of his symphonic powers; and Barshai in Nos 7 (with both sinfoniettas on Melodiya) and 10 (most recently coupled with Kondrashin's No 5 on Melodiya). At the moment it is hard to find these other than as downloads. On CD, the Chandos alternatives are more than decent, while for No 10 Kremerata Baltica is superb (ECM). The coupling of Symphonies Nos 2 and 21 by the Kremerata Baltica and the CBSO with Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla on DG has attracted loud plaudits, not just from me in these pages.

The Trumpet Concerto is in many ways the most distinctive of his concertos, and Håkan Hardenberger is about to take it on

We'll see whether this breakthrough onto a major label heralds a step change for Weinberg orchestral recordings.

All six of his concertos, plus two concertinos and a fantasia for cello and orchestra, are represented in high-quality recordings too numerous to mention. The two flute concertos are helpfully coupled with the Clarinet Concerto and the Cello Fantasia on Chandos (9/08). The classic Soviet accounts of Weinberg's Cello Concerto (Rostropovich), Violin Concerto (Kogan) and Flute Concerto No 1 (Alexander Korneyev) are on Melodiya, though again currently as download only. The finest version of the Trumpet Concerto (played by Dokshitser) is in the above-mentioned three-disc Melodiya chamber music set, which is in my selected discography; this is in many ways the most distinctive of Weinberg's concertos, and Håkan Hardenberger is about to take it into his repertoire. Don't forget the delectable Violin Concertino (as on the Kremerata Baltica

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set with Symphony No 10 and various chamber works) and the recently rediscovered Cello Concertino, which Weinberg later expanded to form the Concerto, played by Tarasova on a Northern Flowers disc (12/18).

OPERAS AND VOCAL MUSIC

Weinberg's seven operas (eight if you count the operetta *The Golden Dress*) are returning to the stage at varying rates. He regarded *The Passenger* as his most important work, and Shostakovich described it as a masterpiece. See and hear it for yourself on the DVD/BluRay of Pountney's Bregenz production, which has since travelled the world. This production has its problematic aspects, but overall it is overwhelming and much to be preferred to the Yekaterinburg staging (Dux DVD, 9/18).

The only genres conspicuously underrepresented in the Weinberg discography are his songs and cantatas

For entry-level Weinbergians, his last opera, *The Idiot* (completed in 1987), after Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel, is harder going. Its drama is more interior and slow burn, but in many ways it's just as crucial as *The Passenger* to an understanding of the composer's personality, in that the central figure of Prince Myshkin shares some of his core character traits of empathy, vulnerability, naivety and the urge to see good in all human beings. Kudos to Thomas Sanderling for masterminding the wonderfully performed Mannheim production, which in 2013 constituted the world premiere of the full-length version and which was recorded live in 2014 for Pan Classics.

The House of Opera website lists in-house recordings of Weinberg's comic opera *Lady Magnesia*, after George Bernard Shaw's send-up melodrama *Passion, Poison, and Petrification*; and his psychological tragedy *The Portrait*, based on Nikolai Gogol's tale of an artist's fateful sell-out to fame and fortune. These made-to-order recordings are no more than basic soundtracks, but the works themselves are again crucial to a rounded picture of the composer's interest. Here's hoping for commercial issues – preferably less heavily cut in the case of *The Portrait* – in the future.

The only genres conspicuously underrepresented in the Weinberg discography are his songs and cantatas. At least the austere impressive Requiem is available – in a live recording from Bregenz (Neos, 5/12). This Soviet response to Britten's *War Requiem* is a sternly uningratiating score, but again vital to an understanding of Weinberg's ethical outlook. As for the songs, the three opuses out of a total of thirty announced as 'Volume One' by Toccata Classics (1/09) in 2008 are all winners, and the performances, especially of the wonderful Op 13 Jewish songs, are excellent. Private recordings of other song collections are tantalising indications of the riches that have yet to find their way to CD.

CONSPICUOUS GAPS

The language barrier is surely one main reason why the songs are so sparsely represented. Weinberg's closest tie to his homeland was through the poetry of Julian Tuwim, which he turned to for no fewer than seven of his song collections, a cantata and two of his symphonies. Singers are gradually rediscovering the power and beauty of these settings, but I look in vain for signs of CD companies queuing up to record them. The Ninth Symphony

is an equally conspicuous gap. This magnificent succession of Tuwim songs, orchestrated and arranged for choir, derives from collections that Weinberg had not been able to publish and the title *Lines that Have Escaped Destruction* evidently refers both to his 'rescuing' of his own songs from oblivion and to Polish culture having survived Nazi depredations. This is not one of the tougher symphonies to perform. So why have we not heard it? Partly because it would take a massive investment to prepare the materials, but partly also because Weinberg chose to frame the settings with a Prelude, Interlude and Postlude apostrophising the Soviet role in liberating Poland. He may well have been unaware of the atrocities committed by the Red Army in that process, and he would probably have been disinclined to believe it, had he been told – and may have calculated that without such framing the symphony would be unperformable in the Soviet Union (it still awaits its world premiere). Whatever the case, those added texts make performance in present-day Poland problematic, to put it mildly.

For much the same reason, it is not easy to see how, despite some wonderful music, his second opera, *The Madonna and the Soldier*, could be restaged without radical producerly intervention, given that it is premised on the supposedly comradely fellowship between wartime Polish villagers and their heroic Red Army liberators. Perhaps the as yet unperformed Symphony No 11 will be heard at some point, despite its dedication to the Lenin centenary and some extreme difficulties for the orchestra; likewise, the less demanding No 15, to solidly conformist texts and composed for the 60th anniversary of the October Revolution, which more or less vanished after its premiere. Such rehabilitations would greatly complicate Weinberg reception, which for the time being draws sustenance and justification from the painful circumstances of his life. But maybe when the time is riper, that complication will be a necessary thing. **G**

SELECTED WEINBERG DISCOGRAPHY

A mere handful of listening material to whet the appetite

	Chamber Music (including the Trumpet Concerto) Various artists Melodiya		Symphony No 5 Moscow Philharmonic Orch / Kondrashin Melodiya
	Complete String Quartets Danel Quartet CPO (4/08, 2/09, 2/12, A/12)		Symphony No 10. Violin Concertino. String Trio. Solo Violin Sonata No 3. Sonatina Kremer <i>vn</i> Grishin <i>va</i> Dirvanauskaitė <i>vc</i> Trifonov <i>pf</i> Kremerata Baltica ECM (4/14)
	Chamber Symphonies Kremerata Baltica et al ECM (4/17)		The Passenger Breedt <i>mez</i> Saccà <i>ten</i> Kelessidi <i>sop</i> et al; Prague Philharmonic Ch; Vienna SO / Currentzis Arthaus DVD/BluRay (2/16)
	Piano Quintet: Borodin Quartet, Weinberg <i>pf</i> Melodiya (4/95)		The Idiot Soloists; Mannheim Nat Th Orch / Sanderling Pan Classics (2/16)
	Syms Nos 2 and 21 Kremerata Baltica; CBSO / Gražinytė-Tyla DG (6/19)		

Communication on the highest level



Whether he's conducting the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in Bruckner or the Vienna Philharmonic in Beethoven, Andris Nelsons is mindful of the profound, indefinable connection between a conductor and his musicians, he tells **Peter Quantrill**

Conducting Bruckner's Eighth Symphony is, on the face of it, an effective weight-loss strategy in itself: 80 minutes of hard cardio and unbroken concentration. And on the podium of the Royal Albert Hall, Andris Nelsons is a picture of vitality, now crouched to ensure that no one even thinks about trying to play louder than a triple *piano*, now reaching to the heavens with an exuberance that encourages the musicians of the Leipzig Gewandhaus to give their utmost.

Nelsons's predecessor as Kapellmeister at the Gewandhaus was Riccardo Chailly, who gave a forthright interview about Beethoven to this magazine eight years ago, when he laid on the line a doctrine of fidelity to the composer's tempo markings. The Decca recordings were deed to his will. Nelsons, who took over from Chailly in 2017, would doubtless be no less content than Chailly with a pile of scores in front of him, but we don't have that particular luxury at a breakfast table in the Savoy, the morning after his BBC Prom. Watching his waistline, he settles for an egg-white omelette with mushrooms, while I hasten cardiac arrest with the house specialty dreamt up by Arnold Bennett, a concoction of smoked haddock, eggs, hollandaise and cream finished off with parmesan.

Nelsons pays unprompted tribute to Chailly's work in questioning scores: 'His Leipzig Beethoven cycle is one of the most exciting. You can discuss everything, but Chailly is deeply convinced the tempi

should be played that way. Nobody can copy that.' (In fact Chailly himself considerably slackened tempi when the red light was off and the Gewandhaus were touring the symphonies.)

Nelsons is quiet in conversation, not diffident but reserved. The word 'subjective' becomes a theme of our conversation. So does the transitory nature of any learning, any performance and any recording. While cycles of Bruckner from Leipzig and Shostakovich from Boston approach their conclusion, Deutsche Grammophon has just released a Beethoven-anniversary box of all nine symphonies taped live in concert with the Vienna Philharmonic (and reviewed in *Gramophone's* November issue), an orchestra with which Nelsons regularly collaborates. The recording producer in both Leipzig and Vienna is Everett Porter. 'If he had done the cycle with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen', reflects Porter, 'it would be a very different sound. Andris isn't someone who comes in and says, "This is the bowing, this is the style, do it." He feels what an orchestra has to offer, and then moulds it, but doesn't try to transform it.'

Nelsons is a thorough pragmatist at heart, happiest when recording in concert, as he does in Leipzig and Boston as well as in Vienna; just as well considering the expense of hiring these orchestras for studio sessions. After the first concert of a project, conductor and producer listen through it together. 'We talk through what he likes and what he wants to change,' says Porter. 'But the complication at that point is that there's usually no more rehearsal. So my role is to offer comments and questions. Sometimes they're of a technical nature – this isn't together, that isn't in tune. Other issues are more musically motivated. With Beethoven, Andris wants the contrasts. The Vienna orchestra is amazing, but it tends to round off the edges.'

Towards the end of the 1970s, the VPO made its first live Beethoven cycle, with Leonard Bernstein in charge. Reproduced with a recent LP reissue of the set, recording sheets detail the timings of each concert and the patch sessions

scheduled for an hour afterwards. Porter is intimately familiar with the cycle, having supervised DG's alternative remastering for high-resolution audio as part of 'Bernstein 100', but he had never worked with the VPO until the Nelsons cycle. Winning the players' trust was key: 'In a project of this nature, I need to be able to go out and say to the musician after the first concert, "Look, we have a problem here, can you solve it in the next concert so that we don't have to deal with it in the patch?"' Time was at a premium. 'Sometimes we used a rehearsal to pre-patch something that was unusually sensitive – a passage that might be obscured by audience noise, for example, or technical issues that you want to make sure are covered.'

'The beginning of the third movement of the Ninth is a famous example. Every orchestra has difficulties getting that passage beautifully in tune, not only Vienna! For the Ninth there were just two concerts, and the choir and orchestra met at the dress rehearsal on the day of the first concert, with a patch session afterwards. So that was a very tight schedule.' Then there is the famous Musikverein acoustic to harness and contend with. 'It's much less dry than the Theater an der Wien where several of the symphonies were first performed,' says Porter, 'but much drier when full than empty. That's always

a challenge when editing, so that you and others don't notice!'

I have talked in the past to musicians from the CBSO and the Royal Opera who would echo Porter's

judgement that Nelsons 'exudes music'. There is a rare combination of reserve, charm, modesty and assurance that wins over hard-bitten professionals. 'With Andris, it's a two-way communication,' says Porter. 'He hears what's happening, he hears what the capabilities and the possibilities are, and he feeds on that.'

In Leipzig, as with previous orchestras new to him, Nelsons has spent time absorbing the Gewandhaus culture: he talks about making 'a human connection' with the orchestra. His Bruckner is not the Bruckner of another recent and distinguished predecessor at the Gewandhaus, Herbert Blomstedt, but it springs from the same source, and the younger man has evidently drawn from that source, and is a conscientious student of his forebears. Eyebrows have been raised about Nelsons taking on too much too soon, spreading himself too thinly across two continents. A century ago, however, Arthur Nikisch was also boss on both sides of the Atlantic at once, and the Gewandhaus hall built for him became the model for Boston's Symphony Hall. Mahler didn't do badly either, dividing his energies between New York and Vienna. Shuttling between Pittsburgh and Amsterdam, fellow Latvian Mariss Jansons was hindered by ill health and a serious fear of flying, but then he was also less cut out than Nelsons for the meet-and-greet aspect of American (and increasingly, European) musical directorship.

So the 'Nelsons Bruckner' cycle is no less a 'Leipzig Bruckner', and the same goes for his Shostakovich in Boston and Beethoven in Vienna. 'Each concert hall has its own interpretation built into its architecture,' remarks the conductor. 'You have a general idea of the architecture of a particular work. But Bruckner may not indicate a tempo change, or many tempo changes – and the ones in the score are not all written by him – so you must find your own, like building a house or something even larger. There has to be a pulse which goes all the way through a piece, but Brahms

'Bruckner assumed that musicians would breathe with the music. You can't lose sight of the biological clock within the structure'



and Bruckner assumed that musicians and conductors would breathe, and breathe with the music. That's speculation on my part, I admit. You can't lose sight of the human biological clock within the structure of a piece.'

The nature of the conductor's 'human connection' with each orchestra is commensurately unique. 'The Vienna Philharmonic is very much a concert orchestra', says Nelsons, 'in that they give something extra in concert if they feel comfortable. If you let them play, then they let you conduct!' The illusion of 'letting' an orchestra play was also one cultivated by Claudio Abbado. 'He gave the impression to musicians that they could play however they felt,' says Nelsons. 'I don't want to say that I'm giving an illusion, not at all. But the rehearsal process is vital. Sometimes you have to be very clear and academic about solving technical issues. But then it's so important to talk about the atmosphere, the metaphors of what the music could subjectively mean, and to find a still deeper level to whatever we're playing.'

Having lately recorded the Eighth back in Leipzig, Nelsons is preoccupied by the art of transition, the silences between paragraphs (which in Bruckner are no less important than the notes), and by ensuring that they feel just right at the end of the editing process as well as in performance. 'It is a matter of gluing these things together. And this is inevitably subjective, how you turn from one place into the next.' There are many



Conducting his Leipzig players, with whom he has made 'a human connection'

'I got the courage to tell the school orchestra I'd been conducting. I began to rehearse them and suddenly felt much less nervous'

I find it so important to be in the same boat as the musicians.'

Daily practice on the trumpet helps keep up his lip, but perhaps also serves to remind Nelsons of where he came from: a high-school trumpeter in Riga who nurtured hidden ambitions for the podium. For three years he took conducting lessons in secret, practising in front of the mirror. Then one day

opportunity came knocking, in the form of Beethoven's Second. 'My conducting teacher was also the conductor of the school orchestra. On this day he didn't come to rehearsal for some reason.

We were all about to leave when I stood up, and told them that I had been conducting. I don't know how I got this sudden courage. I'm a shy person. I don't feel comfortable being at the centre of attention. But something happened – we began to rehearse, and at that moment I knew that I wanted to continue my conducting studies, because I felt much less nervous. I felt taken over by something bigger.'

such transitional moments in Beethoven, too, such as the movement from storm to thanksgiving in the Sixth, or the two tempi of the *Adagio* of the Ninth. 'Following the score [of the Ninth], it's clear there are two different tempi running through the course of the movement. But when it comes to performance, you need to glue them together. Here is the crux of that word interpretation. This word carries a lot of egotistic implications – a sense of taking liberties – but there are moments in any piece where the composer must trust the musicians, and there is where the liberty comes in.

'The *Adagio* of the Ninth begins with a mystical, even religious vision. It's so beautiful, but it feels that Beethoven knows that such beauty isn't possible in the world. In the transition he returns to earth, and there must be a different sound, as well as tempo, to describe what it is to be human. To glue the tempi together is important but so individual to each conductor – it isn't just about a *ritenuto* here or a *diminuendo* there. This is where conducting becomes a psychological process. The attitude of musicians, the thoughts behind their bows, will make the sound different, even more than the technique they or I use.

Beethoven may have learnt from Haydn how to make a grand entrance, but each symphony begins with its own, unique upbeat, many of them graveyards for conductors. How on earth did he manage the Second? With a smile, Nelsons recalls the study he undertook in St Petersburg, in the conducting classes founded by Ilya Musin. 'So much of that teaching concerned the upbeat. Conducting is the art of the upbeat. Everything is in the upbeat – the breathing, the tempo, the preparation for the tempo and the character is all there. Because if you conduct with the music, it's already too late, they're already doing it.' Nelsons sings through the opening of the Second, and explains how the weight of the opening chords is determined by their repetition at the end of the following downward scale. He makes it look, and sound, so easy. There is another wry smile. Nelsons will return to Vienna in January 2020 to lead the traditional New Year's festivities for the first time, and his preparation has included watching the films of Carlos Kleiber, master of ceremonies on two legendary occasions: 'He makes it look as though the music just plays itself.' We think about the five-minute miracle of *Die Libelle*, Josef Strauss's exquisite tone poem on a dragonfly. 'The material seems so slight. Many conductors avoid the piece because it's so difficult not to land heavily, and in the wrong places. When you see Kleiber, you think it's so easy, it's just as written. But he takes – not exactly liberties, but – he gets into the shoes of the composer.'

'It's like learning to talk, except with our hands ... only gradually can we conductors consciously express what we want to say'

Karajan notoriously said of Kleiber that he only conducted when his fridge was empty. When I ask Nelsons what he has learnt from more than 20 years in the profession, he talks in more elevated terms, but also with awareness of wider responsibilities. 'I think it took me 10 years to understand something about conducting. What I had learned about technique began to relate with what I was feeling about the music. It's like when we learn to talk: only gradually can we make it a conscious expression of what we want to say. With conducting we do it through not only our words but our hands and the rest of our bodies.'

'Kleiber was a genius', continues Nelsons, 'and he didn't need to do any communicating beyond the podium. Likewise, Haitink doesn't talk much, but he always says that conducting is a mystical profession. Abbado said the same. There are so many things you can learn, and you should learn, about music and technique and rehearsal – this is something Mariss [Jansons] says. These things make life easier for the musicians. But then there are things you cannot describe. With the exception of the odd bar here and there, the Vienna Philharmonic could play Beethoven without me. What is it that makes them play differently when I am there?'

Nelsons returns once more to the peculiar mutual dependence between conductor and musicians. 'Without a spark between us, there can be no compensation – not the communication with the audience, nor the conversation with donors. You have responsibilities as the Music Director of an orchestra. The musicians are like your family. You need to take care of them.'

Andris Nelsons's Complete Beethoven Symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic on DG was released in October; they'll be touring the symphonies in the spring of 2020

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The Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra at home in the city's elegant Bulgaria Hall

‘A HISTORIC orchestra, in its PRIME’

Bulgaria's leading orchestra, the Sofia Philharmonic, is preparing for a prestigious return visit to Vienna's Musikverein under its music director, Nayden Todorov

Orchestras are said to improve with age. As it settles into its tenth decade, the Sofia Philharmonic certainly proves that theory true. It has established itself as Bulgaria's most illustrious musical institution.

A simple list of the musicians who have collaborated with the Sofia Philharmonic reads like a who's who of 20th-century music: Bruno Walter, David Oistrakh, Dmitry Shostakovich, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Claudio Arrau, Emil Gilels, Kurt Masur, Yuri Temirkanov, Valery Gergiev and Plácido Domingo all take their place among them.

But the arrival of the conductor Nayden Todorov three years ago has arguably provided the orchestra with the most significant collaboration of them all. Like the ensemble's Bulgarian founder Sascha Popov before him, Todorov

benefits from Viennese training and comes with a mission to place his orchestra in the front rank of European ensembles.

His first priority was the orchestra's musicians themselves. 'The task I set myself was to show the musicians that, regardless of the environment in which we live, harmony is possibly not only in music and on stage but in our relations with each other,' says Todorov. 'I have been working for this idea since I took up my position at the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra. Therefore the orchestra's current quality is the result of the hard work of the musicians.'

That quality has not gone unnoticed. It has become increasingly difficult to get tickets to the orchestra's concerts at the elegant Bulgaria Hall, and the ensemble's 91st season – entitled 'Every Concert is a Celebration' – is sure to be no





'Harmony is possible in our relations with each other': players from the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra

different. 'Over the last three seasons, the audience has noticed us opening up to the world,' says Todorov. 'We have shown our society that there are no impossible things and that we can have a bright future if we love what we do and share it with others.' The season in question has been built in collaboration with the audience, whose relationship with Todorov is growing much like that of his musicians.

Todorov has not just increased the communicative spirit of his orchestra. He has engendered a broader, bolder repertoire in its concerts and has brought a new calibre of soloist and guest conductor to work with it, each of them hand-picked under the maestro's supervision. Angela Gheorghiu, Sonya Yoncheva, Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Joshua Bell have all appeared with the ensemble in recent seasons. Among the returning artists in the current season are Vadim Repin, Sarah Chang, Charles Dutoit, Krzysztof Penderecki and Shlomo Mintz.

*The Sofia Philharmonic has performed
at some of the most prestigious venues
in Europe, America and Asia*

Nor is it exclusively the citizens of Bulgaria who stand to benefit. As the country's foremost orchestra, the Sofia Philharmonic began international touring half a century ago and has

performed at some of the most prestigious venues in Europe, America and Asia – showcasing the best of Bulgarian, European and world orchestral music from more than three centuries. It is also a renowned recording and broadcasting orchestra, *Gramophone* noting its 'spirited' and 'well-drilled' playing in decades past.

On December 5 this year, the orchestra returns to what is arguably the most illustrious venue of all: the Golden Hall of the Musikverein in Vienna. Maestro Todorov will conduct a Slavic-themed programme including music by Vladigerov, Stravinsky and Dvořák. Join us and discover one of Europe's best-kept musical secrets for yourself. 6

sofiaphilharmonic.com



Nayden Todorov (left) and the Sofia Philharmonic at the National Palace of Culture (above), and at Bozar in Brussels with the Bulgarian soprano Sonya Yoncheva

MUSIC COMPETITIONS GUIDE

With an increasing number of events being streamed, anyone can experience the thrill of music competitions – even those who aren't competing



Eric Lu, winner of the Leeds International Piano Competition 2018; the prize included a Warner Classics recording (11/18)

UK GUIDE

Bampton Classical Opera Young Singers' Competition

Next competition: Autumn 2021

Application deadline: see website

Launched in 2013, this Oxford-based biennial competition aims to identify the finest emerging opera singers currently working in the UK. Previous winners include mezzo Anna Starushkevych and soprano Galina Averina.

bamptonopera.org

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World

Next competition: June 2021

Application deadline: see website

A serious career stepping stone, this major biennial competition awards two top prizes: the Main Prize and the Song Prize. Previous winners include Catriona Morison (2017) and Jamie Barton (2013).

bbc.co.uk/cardiffsinger

BBC Young Musician

Next competition: 2020

Application deadline: passed

Open to string, percussion,

woodwind, brass and keyboard players under the age of 18, this biennial competition was won hands down in 2018 by 16-year-old pianist Lauren Zhang. It has a habit of making stars of its winners, too, as witness the success of Sheku Kanneh-Mason (2016), Jess Gillam (2016 finalist) and, further back, Nicola Benedetti (2004) and Benjamin Grosvenor (2004 finalist).

The competition is broadcast on BBC Four, with complementary coverage on BBC Radio 3.

bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00bb3wt

Donatella Flick LSO Conducting Competition

Next competition:

February 27 – March 1, 2021

Application deadline: June 29, 2020

The stakes are high for the three young European Union-based conductors who make it through to the finals at London's Barbican of this biennial competition run by the London Symphony Orchestra

because, in addition to a cash prize of £15,000, the winner is named LSO Assistant Conductor. And it can lead to even greater things: the 2014 winner Elim Chan, for example, is incoming Chief Conductor of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

lso.co.uk/lso-discovery/donatella-flick-lso-conducting-competition

Early Music Young Ensemble Competition

Next competition: Autumn 2020

Application deadline: see website

Launched in November 2018, this competition was founded as part of the Early Music Shop's 50th anniversary celebrations, and the plan is for it to be a biennial event. It's open to ensembles of all nationalities of two or more players whose average age is under 30. Repertoire needs to be pre-1800, but there's also the potential for playing a contemporary piece written for period instruments. The inaugural 2018 edition took place in Blackheath before a jury consisting of Emma Kirkby, James Johnstone

and Tom Beets; the joint winners of the First Prize won £1000 each plus a recital at the London Festival of Early Music 2019.

earlymusicshop.com/pages/early-music-young-ensemble-competition

Handel Singing Competition

Next competition: 2020

(first round, February 6-8; semi-final, March 6; final, March 26)

Application deadline: December 1

Established in 2002, this major Baroque vocal competition for singers aged between 23 and 34 attracts some 150 international competitors. Past finalists include Iestyn Davies, Ruby Hughes and Lucy Crowe. Its finals at St George's Hanover Square, accompanied by the London Handel Orchestra under Laurence Cummings, are open to the public as part of the annual London Handel Festival. Jurors this year include Ian Partridge, Catherine Denley and Michael George. Cash prizes include a First of £5000 and a Second of £2000, and all the finalists are invited back for future performances at the Festival.

london-handel-festival.com/handel-singing-competition/2020-competition

Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition

Next competition:

February 22 – March 6, 2021

Application deadline:

Autumn 2020

The new development for this historical competition for pianists aged between 16 and 30 is that it will now be held biennially rather than annually. What we know so far is that the competition's relationship with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra continues, providing an extra draw for getting as far as the concerto finals at Hastings's White Rock Theatre. Plus, in addition to £15,000, the winner of the First Prize also secures concerto performances with the orchestra. Also worth noting is that engagements may be

offered to other prizewinners and that there's a long list of cash prizes beyond the top one.

hastingsinternationalpiano.org

Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship Fund Competition

Next competition:

April 21 & 24, 2020

Application deadline:

February 3, 2020

Held every year, this competition is open to singers of all nationalities who have completed at least one year of continuous higher-level study in the UK or Republic of Ireland at a recognised conservatoire. Former prizewinners include Karen Cargill, Robin Tritschler and James Newby. Following preliminary auditions in March, the semi-finals and finals take place before a public audience at Wigmore Hall. First Prize is £12,500, and Second is £6000; there's also the Ferrier Loveday Song Prize and an Accompanist's Prize (James Baillieu won in 2006) awarded through Help Musicians UK. ferrierawards.org.uk

Pierre Fournier Award

Next competition: 2021

Application deadline: see website

Open to cellists of all nationalities aged 30 or under on July 1, 2021, this competition – which takes place every three years – was founded in 1988 by Ralph Kirshbaum. It offers a recital at London's Wigmore Hall, a professional CD recording of this recital, and a performance with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

pierrefournieraward.com

Leeds International Piano Competition

Next competition:

September 8-18, 2021

Application deadline: see website

One of the UK's most internationally prestigious competitions, the Leeds relaunched itself in 2018 under the artistic direction of BBC New Generation Artists founder Adam Gatehouse and pianist Paul Lewis with a pledge to appoint a jury that would reflect the classical music industry as a whole and a prize of a debut CD on Warner Classics. For 2021, Imogen Cooper is chairing the jury, and there's a new partnership with the RLPO, who

will play with the finalists under the baton of Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze.

leedspiano.com

London Mozart Players' Mozart Memorial Prize

Next competition:

February 20-22, 2020

Application deadline:

January 31, 2020

Launched in 1968, laid to rest in 1982 and resurrected in 2019 in honour of the London Mozart Players' 70th anniversary, this competition helped launch the careers of pianists such as Imogen Cooper and Stephen Kovacevich, and has now been revitalised for the 21st century with a new prize structure and a partnership with Kent International Piano Courses. The winner enjoys a year's relationship with the LMP as Pianist in Association and is mentored by pianist and LMP Conductor Laureate Howard Shelley. From this point, there will be an annual winner, chosen from participants in the Kent International Piano Courses, which are open to pianists of all ages in three concurrent courses, the advanced course being for emerging pianists of music conservatoire standard.

kipc.co.uk/register

RNCM James Mottram International Piano Competition

Next competition:

November 2020

Application deadline: see website

This major biennial event offers an all-round learning experience for young pianists under 30 from all over the world. There is a substantial prize fund including a First Prize of £10,000 and the chance to gain a scholarship to study at the Royal Northern College of Music, the home of a leading piano department. As an added incentive to apply, travel bursaries are available to shortlisted participants who live outside Europe. All participants will receive invaluable learning opportunities: those who do not progress to the next stage of the competition will be given the chance to take part in a public masterclass held by a jury member during their time in Manchester.

rncm.ac.uk/jmipc-info

Scottish International Piano Competition

Next competition:

September 1-12, 2020

Application deadline:

March 31, 2020

Founded in 1986, this Glasgow-based triennial competition is one of the few major international piano competitions in the UK. Open to pianists of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30, previous winners include Can Çakmur (2017), Jonathan Fournel (2014), Oxana Schevchenko (2010) and Tom Poster (2007). The 2020 jury will be chaired by Professor Aaron Shorr (Head of Keyboard at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland). First Prize is £10,000 plus a concerto engagement with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Early rounds at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland will be live-streamed on the competition website, as will the concerto final with the RSNO at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall.

scottishinternationalpiano.com

Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition

Next competition:

April 12-18, 2021

Application deadline:

October 2020

Under the auspices of Wigmore Hall since 2010, this respected triennial competition began life back in 1979 as The International String Quartet Competition, when it was won by the Tákacs Quartet no less. Open to quartets whose members are under 35, the competition's repertoire requirements span the entire string quartet tradition, from Classical to the present day. The next instalment is offering prize money totalling £23,000, plus professional development prizes; to give an example, the 2018 First Prize, won by the Esmé Quartet, included a tour of the UK, a recital at Wigmore Hall, residencies at the Banff Centre (Alberta) and the Avaloch Farm Music Institute (New Hampshire), and a recording contract with Champs Hill.

wigmore-hall.org.uk/string-quartet-competition/wigmore-hall-international-string-quartet-competition

Windsor Festival International String Competition

Next competition:

March 20-27, 2021

Application deadline:

December 1, 2020

This biennial competition is hosted by Windsor Festival and the finals are held in the glorious setting of Windsor Castle. It was launched in 2008 as a tribute to the legendary violinist Yehudi Menuhin and, this year, had an especially strong and interesting group of 2019 laureates who are all 'ones to watch': Jonathan Swensen took First Prize, with fellow cellist Jamal Aliyev taking both the Second and Audience Prizes, and violinist Mathilde Milwidsky walking away with Third. No doubt a major reason for the high level of candidates is that the competition's prizes are highly covetable ones from a career perspective: a concerto appearance with the competition's Associate Orchestra, the Philharmonia; a solo recording opportunity with Champs Hill Records; and a fine contemporary bow from Bishop Instruments and Bows. The 2021 competition is likely to include a new, additional chamber round, making it three live rounds in total from Windsor.

windsorfestival.com/

international-string-competition

York Early Music International Young Artists Competition

Next competition: July 14-17, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Based at York's National Centre for Early Music, this biennial period-performance competition takes place as part of York's Early Music Festival and invites applications from instrumental and vocal ensembles of three or more musicians whose average age is 32 or under. The prizes are well worth winning: First Prize is a recording contract with Linn Records (the album from 2017 winners BaroccoTout was made a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice in this year's September issue). Other prizes include a place on the prestigious 'Eemerging' project which promotes new talent in early music, £1000 cash and a concert as part of the York Early Music Festival.

yorkcomp.ncem.co.uk

69th ARD International Music Competition Munich

August 31 to September 18, 2020

Piano Trombone Flute String Quartet



JeungBeum Sohn
1st prize 2017



Sébastien Jacot
1st prize 2015



Michael Buchanan
1st prize 2015



Quatuor Arod
1st prize 2016

Application
deadline:
March 31, 2020

EUROPE GUIDE



Adám Szokolay, 23, wins the Bartók World Competition in September of this year

International Aeolus Wind Competition

Next competition:

September 8-13, 2020

Application deadline:

April 30, 2020

Based in Düsseldorf and open to all nationalities born on or after January 1, 1992, 2020's disciplines are horn, clarinet and saxophone, and the jury chaired by Nicholas Milton includes saxophonist Timothy McAllister, horn player Radovan Vlatković and clarinetist Ralph Manno. First Prize is €20,000, Second is €15,00 and Third is €10,000, with €3000 of each coming in the form of a scholarship to be used for concert performances. The prizewinners' concert will be broadcast a few weeks after the event.

aeoluswettbewerb.de

Géza Anda International Piano Competition

Next competition:

May 27 - June 5, 2021

Application deadline:

January 31, 2021

Established in 1978 by Hortense Anda-Bührle, the widow of the Swiss-Hungarian pianist, this triennial Zurich-based competition is open to pianists born after May 27, 1989, and gives its finalists a chance to perform with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra under the baton of Gergely Madaras. Beyond generous cash prizes, the three prizewinners

receive international concert engagements and free artist management for three years.

geza-anda.ch

ARD International Music Competition

Next competition:

August 31 - September 9, 2020

Application deadline:

March 31, 2020

Based in Munich and open to musicians aged between 17 and 29, this is Germany's largest classical music competition, with a starry roster of high-profile previous winners including Jessye Norman, Christoph Eschenbach and Mitsuko Uchida. It has some serious career-launching potential: Quatuor Ébène have described how when they won it in 2004 their engagements exploded from 10 a year to 130. The string quartet is again among this year's disciplines, along with piano, flute and trombone, and the judges include pianist Imogen Cooper and flautist Sharon Bezaly. You can watch the semi-finals, finals and prizewinners' concerts live on the competition's website.

br.de/ard-music-competition/index.html

Princess Astrid Competition

Next competition:

October 12-15, 2020

Application deadline:

May 15, 2020

Established in 1953, this major

biennial competition hosted by the Trondheim Symfoniorkester and Opera rotates between violin and conducting. Next year is for violinists aged 30 and under, and they're competing for prizes including a First of NOK16,000 plus a soloist engagement with the Trondheim Symfoniorkester and Opera. The October 15 final concert will be streamed on the website.

tso.no/competition

International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition

Next competition:

July 13-25, 2020

Application deadline:

February 25, 2020

A notable previous prizewinner of this biennial Leipzig-based period-performance competition is the cellist Philip Higham (2008). Categories for 2020 are organ (whose finalists get to perform on Leipzig Thomaskirche's Bach Organ), voice, and cello/Baroque cello. Participants need to be at least 16 and experienced in performing in a historically informed style. As for the three respective juries, organ is headed by Arvid Gast, voice by Ton Koopman and cello by Ralph Kirshbaum. Beyond three prizes of €10,000, €7500 and €5000, others include high-profile concert engagements and a recording on the GENUIN label.

bachwettbewerb-leipzig.de/en/bach-competition/bach-competition-2020

Bartók World Competition and Festival

Next competition: 2020

Application deadline: see website

This Hungarian competition run by the Liszt Academy was only launched in 2017, to mark the 135th anniversary of Bartók's death, and its structure is a slightly unusual one: it's built in a six-year cycle around the most characteristic strands of Bartók's oeuvre, ie piano, violin, chamber music and composition, with the individual instrumental competitions taking place biennially, punctuated by composer competitions which always tie to the forthcoming instrumental category. Pianist Year in 2019 was won this September by Adám Szokolay, who received

a cash prize of €30,000. The 2020 edition is for composers, with a gala concert planned for November.

bartokworldcompetition.hu

Basel Composition Competition

Next competition: March 3-7, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Now in its third edition, this composition competition established in memory of the conductor and patron Paul Sacher and based at the Theater Basel has a starry jury chaired by Michael Jarrell, and including Andrea Scartazzini and Felix Meyer. It's awarding cash prizes topped by a First of CHF60,000, to successful composers of all ages and nationalities, with a focus on chamber and symphony orchestra compositions, and it asks for new, non-premiered works, which can be previously unfinished compositions completed in time for the competition (as long as they haven't been premiered in whole or in part, and haven't yet received any prize). The live rounds will be performed by the Basel Chamber Orchestra, Basel Sinfonietta and the Basel Symphony Orchestra. The competition takes place at the church in Don Bosco, and there is likely to be video content made available via the competition's YouTube channel.

baselcompetition.com

International Telekom Beethoven Competition Bonn

Next competition:

December 6-14, 2019

Application deadline: passed

Taking place biennially since 2005, this Bonn competition for pianists under the age of 33 focuses on the works of Beethoven from every phase of his creative life, along with the music of his predecessors, contemporaries and successors, with a final that targets Beethoven's piano concertos. The next couple of years are looking very full, as one might expect given the 250 anniversary celebrations. So, moving beyond this year's competition, the entirety of which you can catch streamed on the competition's website, 2020 features a December 12 Prizewinner Summit in which all recipients of First Prize from the 2005 competition up to the present

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Premio Paolo Borciani

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Francesco Dillon, *cello*, Quartetto Prometeo
Veronika Hagen, *viola*, Hagen Quartett
Alexander Lonquich, *piano*
Kim Kashkashian, *viola*
Abel Tomàs, *violin*, Cuarteto Casals

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WORLD FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COMPETITIONS

Info

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54th International Vocal Competition
Opera | Oratorio
's-Hertogenbosch
Netherlands
28 Nov - 6 Dec 2020



Jury

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Deborah Polaski
Vesselina Kasarova
Hein Mulders | Intendant Oper, Philharmonie, Essener Philharmoniker
Rosemary Joshua & Damia Carbonell | Dutch National Opera
Et al.

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Ivan Monighetti

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30 April 2020

concoursgeneve.ch
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WORLD FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COMPETITIONS

DESIGN: THEWORKSHOP.CH — PHOTO: BERTRAND COTTET

will come together to perform. This is also to be live-streamed.
telekom-beethoven-competition.de

International Jeunesses Musicales Competition Belgrade

Next competition:
March 21-30, 2020
Application deadline:
February 15, 2020
 Held annually since 1971, this Belgrade competition hosted by the Ilija Milosavljević Kolarac Foundation rotates disciplines between flute, guitar, piano and cello. For 2020, it's Cello Year.
muzicka-omladina.org

Besançon International Competition for Young Conductors

Next competition:
September 20-25, 2021
Application deadline:
January 2021
 This French biennial conducting competition for those aged 35 and under sits within the International Music Festival of Besançon. The preliminaries are likely to be held in Beijing, Montreal, Berlin and Besançon, with 20 candidates then selected for the orchestral rounds in Besançon.
festival-besancon.com

Queen Elisabeth Competition, Brussels

Next competition:
May 4-30, 2020
Application deadline:
December 4, 2019
 The 2020 competition is for pianists aged between 18 and 30; previous piano laureates are a lofty bunch, beginning with Emil Gilels winning its first edition in 1938; the 2010 and 2013 winners were Denis Kozukhin and Boris Giltburg respectively, and the 2016 winner was Lukáš Vondráček. The finalists play in the Palais des Beaux-Arts with the Brussels Philharmonic under Stéphane Denève, and cash prizes amount to a total of €128,500. The semi-finals onwards are being streamed live/on demand on the website, and the live audio stream of the first round will be available on the auvio.be website.
qeimc.be

Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition

Next competition: August 2021
Application deadline: April 1, 2020
 Pianists from all over the world are invited to register for the 63rd edition of this historical competition, whose past winners include Alfred Brendel, Martha Argerich and Louis Lortie. From 100 shortlisted candidates invited to Bolzano in 2020 for the preliminary rounds, 27 go through to the finals in 2021.
concorsobusoni.it

Maria Canals International Music Competition

Next competition:
March 22 - April 2, 2020
Application deadline:
December 10, 2019
 Founded in 1954 and held at Barcelona's Palau de la Música Catalana, this annual competition is aimed at performers of all nationalities aged between 18 and 30. The 2020 edition is open to pianists, and the finalists get to perform with the Jove Orquestra Nacional de Catalunya. While each year more than €80,000 is distributed, perhaps even more interesting is the large list of concert engagements on offer. Competition events are broadcast live online, and videos of each round are available on the website within hours of each session. Catalonia's classical music radio station, Catalunya Música, broadcasts the final live.
mariacanal.org

Chopin Competition, Warsaw

Next competition:
October 2-23, 2020
Application deadline: December 1
 Established in 1927, this major competition for pianists born between 1990 and 2004 has right from its earliest days championed not simply the music of Fryderyk Chopin, but also the playing of it as Chopin himself envisaged it; former winners include Maurizio Pollini, Martha Argerich and Krystian Zimerman. There's a fantastic option for remote viewers this year, thanks to specially constructed 'Listener Zones' in various cities around the world, including Moscow, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Seoul, Paris, London and New York. Rock up to one of these, and you can receive

a listener's package (notebook, T-shirt, keyring, pen, cup, souvenir album) and comfortable seating (plus blankets if live viewing is going to be a night-owl pursuit in your particular time zone) to watch live broadcasts of selected competition stages and concerts, with live concerts during the interval, and a commentary studio where you can hear discussions from musicologists and artists. There's even a Virtual Reality experience, giving you the sensation of actually being in the Concert Hall of the National Philharmonic in Warsaw. The jury for this year is chaired by Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń, and mixes outstanding Chopin interpreters with former prizewinners, teachers and Chopin experts, including Martha Argerich, Nelson Goerner, Nelson Freire and John Rink. There's a long list of cash and special prizes topped off by €40,000 and a gold medal for First. As previously mentioned, those who can't get to Warsaw or a Listener Zone can see it streamed online in HD and VR.
chopin2020.pl

International Music Competition Cologne

Next competition:
September 28 - October 3, 2020
Application deadline:
May 15, 2020
 This triennial competition is organised by the Academy of Music and Dance in Cologne in cooperation with WDR, whose Radio Orchestra accompanies the finalists. The 2020 edition is open to male and female singers and pianists of all nationalities aged under 30. The top three finalists receive cash prizes of €10,000, €6000 and €3000 while the overall winner is also offered concert engagements.
imwk.hfmt-koeln.de/en

Enescu Competition

Next competition:
August 29 - September 20, 2020
Application deadline:
April 15, 2020
 Open to violinists, pianists, cellists and composers, this major biennial competition sits under the brand of the George Enescu International Festival, the largest worldwide cultural event organised by Romania, and is supported by

the President of Romania. Beyond cash prizes, the competition offers concert engagements such as a performance during the 2020/2021 Festival and Competition, and others with Romania's Philharmonic Orchestras. Its four judging panels are overseen by two renowned conductors: Honorary President Zubin Mehta and Artistic Director Vladimir Jurowski.
festivalenescu.ro

Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann

Next competition:
November 15-22, 2020
Application deadline: July 1, 2020
 Held every four years by the Kronberg Academy in collaboration with the Berlin University of the Arts, this prestigious competition – which began in 2002 – is open in 2020 to cellists of all nationalities born in or after 1992. It has two live rounds, which take place in Berlin's Kammermusiksaal in front of a public audience: first a recital round for 12 participants, whose repertoire includes a brand new commissioned work, after which three participants will progress to the concerto round. As for prizes, the Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann awards €15,000 plus possible concert engagements and festival appearances; there's also a Second Prize of €10,000 and a Third of €3000. Best interpretation of the competition commission wins €3000, too, as does the recipient of the Young Musicians Prize.
kronbergacademy.de/en/events

International Edvard Grieg Piano Competition

Next competition:
September 12-20, 2020
Application deadline:
April 20, 2020
 Hosted by KODE Edvard Grieg Museum Trolldhaugen Bergen, Norway, this competition is open to pianists of all nationalities born between 1987 and 2003. It offers its winning pianist a cash prize of €30,000, and beyond the various additional cash prizes there are also a number of special prizes and concert opportunities. The final takes place at Grieg Hall; all rounds will be live-streamed on the website.
griegcompetition.com

Clara Haskil Piano Competition**Next competition:****August 24 – September 3, 2021****Application deadline: see website**

Hosted by the Swiss town of Vevey, where pianist Clara Haskil lived from 1942 until her death, this competition is distinctive for offering only one award: the Clara Haskil Prize, consisting of a cash prize of CHF25,000, accompanied by various concert engagements. The other finalists each receive CHF5000. With the jury presided over by Christian Zacharias, it's a competition worth following. Past winners include Steven Osborne, Finghin Collins and Till Felner.

clara-haskil.ch**International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch****Next competition:****November 27 – December 6, 2020****Application deadline:****September 2020**

Founded in 1954, this is the Netherlands' only classical vocal competition. It encompasses oratorio and art song as well as opera, with a special focus on 20th-century and contemporary music, and disciplines rotate. For 2020 the competition focuses on opera and oratorio, and among the long list of prizes to be won are the Grand Prize, the Opera Prize and the Oratorium Prize, each of which amounts to €7500. The final and the masterclasses are streamed on the competition's website.

ivc.nu**International Competition for Young Pianists in Memory of Vladimir Horowitz****Next competition:****April 20-30, 2020****Application deadline:****February 1, 2020**

This Kiev-based piano competition is split between four age categories which rotate. Next year is for the Senior category, aimed at pianists aged between 16 and 33, and the six prizes on offer include a First Prize of \$10,000. Previous prizewinner Vadym Kholodenko went on to win Gold at the 14th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition; many other laureates, too, go on to win major competitions elsewhere.

horowitzv.org**Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition Hannover****Next competition:****September 26 – October 9, 2021****Application deadline: see website**

The arrival of artistic directors Antje Weithaas and Oliver Wille after the 10th edition in 2018 has prompted changes in requirements and a new jury structure: the competition now aims to attract more mature violinists, having raised its age limit by five years to 32. It's also lowering the cash prizes, from €50,000, €30,000 and €20,000 respectively for the top three, to €10,000 for each finalist, plus for one of them the €30,000 Joseph Joachim Prize. Not only that, the non-cash prizes – the three-year loan of a Guadagnini, a CD recording and G Henle sheet music worth €2000 – no longer automatically go to the Joseph Joachim prizewinner, but are instead distributed as the judges see fit. In addition, representatives of leading European ensembles (Konzerthaus Berlin, Camerata Bern, etc) will themselves award the 20-plus concert engagements, the semi-final string quartet movement will only be announced 24 hours before the performance, and the contemporary work will be part of the final round.

jjv-hannover.de/en**Khachaturian International Competition****Next competition:****June 6-13, 2020****Application deadline:****March 20, 2020**

An annual Yerevan-based competition whose disciplines rotate annually between piano, violin, cello, voice and conducting. The 2020 competition is devoted to the violin, being open to violinists of all nationalities aged between 16 and 32 at the start of the competition. The prizes are very much worth having: the First is a cash prize equal to \$15,000, along with a concert during the 2020/21 and 2021/2022 concert seasons with orchestras suggested by the competition. First and Second Prizes, meanwhile, amount to the equivalent of \$10,000 and \$5000 respectively.

khachaturian-competition.com

International Mozart Competition Salzburg: 2018's six singer finalists (see page 41)

Liszt Competition**Next competition:****March 16-28, 2020****Application deadline: passed**

The next edition of this Utrecht-based piano competition/festival at TivoliVrendenburg is centred for the first time around a theme – 'Beethoven seen through the eyes of Liszt'. Open to pianists aged between 20 and 29, its rounds include solo, chamber and orchestral, and it's the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra which accompanies the three finalists, judged by an international jury including Idil Biret and Leslie Howard. Cash prizes include a First of €12,000 – plus, all three prizewinners receive a career development programme worth more than €300,000. There are lots of remote-viewing options: the rounds will be live-streamed on the competition website, and also on its YouTube and Facebook pages.

liszt.nl**Livorno Piano Competition****Next competition:****January 21-26, 2020****Application deadline:****December 13, 2019**

Chaired by Walter Ponce, the main Livorno Piano Competition is open to pianists under the age of 33, who are competing for a First Prize of €4000 plus concert engagements. However that's not all, because beyond the main competition there is also the Young LPC Premio Enrico Galletta for young pianists aged under 19, which offers a cash First Prize of €800. Plus, three further

categories are offering cash prizes: Baby, Junior and Young Talents, for which the age limits are nine, 12 and 15. Joining Artistic Director Carlo Palese on the judging panel are Milana Chernyavska, Francesco Libetta and Luca Schieppati, and the good news is that you can watch the final round and prize-giving ceremony streamed live on the competition's YouTube page.

livornopianocompetition.com**Long Thibaud Crespin International Singing Competition 2021****Next competition:****November 10-14, 2020****Application deadline:****March, 2020**

Established in 1943 and operating three annually rotating disciplines of piano, violin and voice, the Long Thibaud Crespin Singing Competition unveiled a new, refreshed format in 2018, with major performing artists serving as each discipline's artistic directors, and a First Prize of €25,000 coupled with a career-boosting recording on Warner Classics. So far we've had violin under Renaud Capuçon and piano under Bertrand Chamayou. Now it's the voice competition's turn to get its own first revitalised airing under the artistic direction of Vienna State Opera Director, Dominique Meyer (La Scala's incoming 2021 Director). The selections take place during May and June in Paris, London, Vienna, Berlin, Milan, Moscow, Beijing, Seoul, Johannesburg and New York.

long-thibaud-crespin.org

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EDVARD GRIEG MUSEUM TROLDHAUGEN KODE





Baritone Sergey Kaydalov wins Norway's Queen Sonja singing competition in 2019

Lyon International Chamber Music Competition

Next competition:

April 28 - May 3, 2020

Application deadline:

January 15, 2020

Established in 2004, this chamber music competition focuses on a different instrumental grouping each year, and counts among its laureates Ukrainian violinist Diana Tishchenko, who has just released a strong debut CD on Warner Classics as winner of the 2018 Long Thibaud Crespin Violin Competition. It's violinists, in fact, who get a chance to shine for 2020 too, because this edition is centred around the violin and piano duo, open to those aged 30 and under, with repertoire to include a commission from Florentine Mulsant. Beyond the cash prizes there's career development assistance and potential concert engagements. You can catch it live and on catch-up on NoMadMusic. cimcl.fr

Mahler Competition

Next competition:

June 29 - July 5, 2020

Application deadline:

November 30, 2019

Open to conductors aged 35 and under, the Bamberg Symphony's conducting competition includes Gustavo Dudamel and Lahav Shani among its previous winners. Beyond its big-name laureates it stands out for its commitment to the no-barriers opportunities it offers (no expenses or costly fees to contend with) and its educational

remit (all candidates stay until the end even if eliminated, so they can communicate with and learn from jury members). The 2020 judging panel includes Jakub Hrůša, Barbara Hannigan, composer Helmut Lachenmann, Askonas Holt co-founder Martin Campbell-White and a member of the orchestra, and the competition is awarding cash prizes of €30,000, €20,000 and €10,000.

bamberger-symphoniker.de/en.html

International Instrumental Competition Markneukirchen

Next competition:

May 7-16, 2020

Application deadline:

January 10, 2020 (horn)

January 21, 2020 (tuba)

This annual competition alternates between string and wind instruments, and 2020 is open to horn players born after January 1, 1990, and tuba players born after January 1, 1988. Cash prizes for each discipline are €7000, €5000 and €3500, and the winners also receive a concert engagement with the Chursächsische Philharmonie Bad Elster. In a bid to encourage more female brass players, there's also a special prize for the best female tuba participant.

instrumental-competition.de

International Violin Competition Henri Marteau

Next competition:

April 26 - May 9, 2020

Application deadline:

January 31, 2020

This triennial competition run

by the Hofer Symphoniker takes place in Lichtenberg's Haus Marteau and the Freiheitshalle in Hof, and is open to violinists born after May 8, 1995. It provides cash and non-cash awards and a subsequent support programme including scholarships, concert engagements and broadcasts with the competition's media partner, the Bayerischer Rundfunk, which is also broadcasting the competition.

violinwettbewerb-marteau.de

Meistersinger von Nürnberg Singing Competition

Next competition:

July 24-29, 2020

Application deadline:

January 15, 2020

Launched by the Nuremberg State Theatre in 2016, this biennial competition is for singers aged between 18 and either 32 (women) or 34 (men) who have some professional experience already under their belts, or are enrolled as students at a conservatoire. International pre-selections are taking place in Moscow, Brussels, Nuremberg, Hamburg and Seattle; the jury for the actual competition is presided over by Professor Siegfried Jerusalem; and among several cash prize on offer are a First of €10,000 and a Second of €6000. nuernberg-competition.com/english

Queen Sonja International Music Competition, Norway

Next competition:

August 10-20, 2021

Application deadline: April 1, 2021

One of the world's leading voice competitions, always with a panel of prominent judges, this biennial contest counts soprano Lise Davidsen amongst its recent winners (2015), who was of course *Gramophone's* 2018 Young Artist of the Year.

qsimc.no

Carl Nielsen Competition

Next competition:

March or April 2022

Application deadline: see website

The next edition of this Odense-based competition may not be until 2022, but it's major and prestigious enough for us to want to acknowledge it nevertheless, not

least because when it announces its 2022 details the prizes will be covetable ones; in 2019, they included €12,000, a solo recording with the Odense SO on Orchid Classics, and the chance to perform with up to 10 orchestras.

carlnielsenscompetition.com

Elena Obraztsova International Competition of Young Opera Singers

Next competition:

September 2021

Application deadline: July 1, 2021

The 13th edition of this major St Petersburg competition is open to opera singers of all voices, with substantial cash prizes: a Grand Prix of RUB700,000, then a First of RUB500,000, a Second of RUB350,000, and RUB250,000 for Third. Streaming plans are afoot so keep checking the website.

obraztsova.org

Orleans Concours International

Next competition:

April 16-26, 2020

Application deadline: passed

One notable feature of this piano competition is that it accepts applicants aged up to 36; another is its focus on contemporary music. The three first winners get to perform at Paris's atmospheric Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, and beyond cash the long list of prizes includes career-development plans to include multiple concert engagements, a CD, and introductions to notable contemporary composers. Plus, there's a €5000 composition prize for the best new piece introduced by the candidates themselves.

oci-piano.com

Premio Paolo Borciani

Next competition:

June 7-14, 2020

Application deadline:

January 31, 2020

Taking place triennially at Teatro Municipale Valli in Reggio Emilia, this international string quartet competition has a starry roster of previous winners including the Pavel Haas Quartet (2005), the Artemis Quartet (1997) and the Keller Quartet (1990). The First Prize is very much one designed

to launch a quartet's career too, because beyond cash it includes a 2020-21 artistic residency at Reggio Emilia and an international tour. As for the jury, it's presided over by Philharmonie de Paris director Emmanuel Hondré, and includes Hagen Quartett viola player Veronika Hagen and Tokyo String Quartet violinist Martin Beaver.
<http://www.iteatri.re.it/Sezione.jsp?idSezione=4048>

International Percussion Competition (Composition)

Next competition: April 2020

Application deadline:

March 25, 2020

International Percussion Competition

Next competition:

February 13-21, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Two competitions in one! The percussion-centred Luxembourg-based event rotates between a composition competition and a performance one, the latter's participants being required to perform the winning work from the previous composition year. For 2020 and 2021 the focus is percussion trio, with the composition competition requiring a seven- to eight-minute work featuring one mallet instrument.
ipcl.lu

Michele Pittaluga International Guitar Competition

Next competition:

September 21-26, 2020

Application deadline:

July 1, 2020 (composers)

August 31, 2020 (guitarists)

This Italian competition runs a composition-for-guitar category alongside its main one for guitarists. First Prize for the guitarists is €10,000 plus a concert tour in Italy and abroad, a Naxos recording and Idagio streaming; the composition prize offers €3000, a public premiere, and some major publishing opportunities.
pittaluga.org

Prague Spring International Music Competition

Next competition: May 7-15, 2020

Application deadline:

December 3, 2019

Sitting within the major Prague

Spring Festival and with its disciplines rotating annually, this Czech competition is open for 2020 to bassoonists and clarinetists under 30. As for the prizes, which total CZK720,000, these include a concert at the Prague Spring Festival. On Czech Radio's YouTube channel, you can catch the live-streamed second round and finals, with all the links available on the competition's website.
festival.cz/en/competition

International Conducting Competition Rotterdam

Next competition:

May 21 - June 4, 2021

Application deadline: July 1, 2020

This exciting new international event comprises multiple rounds, each focusing on a different specialism, during which young conductors work with orchestras such as the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the Rotterdam PO. The high-profile jury includes Sian Edwards, Jane Glover, Martyn Brabbins and Iván Fischer. The competition is open to professional conductors of all nationalities aged between 23 and 35.
iccr.nl

International Mozart Competition Salzburg

Next competition:

February 1-15, 2020

Application deadline: passed

The works of Mozart are at the heart of this biennial competition with rotating disciplines run by the University Mozarteum Salzburg. For 2020, the instruments are violin, piano and horn, and three university professors chair the three juries. Each category has three top prizes of €10,000, €7000 and €5000.
uni-mozarteum.at

International Chamber Music Competition 'Franz Schubert and Modern Music'

Next competition:

February 6-15, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Established by the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz in 1989, this triennial competition invites young ensembles from all over the world to compete as part of a festival of chamber music, with around €100,000 of prize money on offer, making it one of the world's

highest-paying competitions.

schubert.kug.ac.at

International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition

Next competition:

November 22 - December 3, 2020

Application deadline: see website

This competition organised by the Sibelius Society and the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki is a real 'one to watch'. Open to violinists born in or after 1990, it strongly features the music of Jean Sibelius - his chamber music in the earlier rounds, and then of course the Concerto in the final.
sibeliuscompetition.fi

Smetana International Piano Competition

Next competition:

November 3-9, 2020

Application deadline: see website

Held in Pilsen in the Czech Republic, this competition has three age categories: the first for age 16 and younger, the second for 20 years and younger and the third for 30 years and under. Finalists in the third category will perform with the Pilsen Philharmonic Orchestra.
piano-competition.com

International JM Sperger Competition for Double Bass

Next competition:

July 19-26, 2020

Application deadline:

May 22, 2020

The biennial JM Sperger Competition for double bassists born after January 1, 1985, stands out for having some big names involved; one of the patrons is Thomas Hengelbrock, and the 2020 jury includes Chi-chi Nwanoku.
spergerwettbewerb.de/index.php/en/

TONALi Competition

Next competition:

June 15-19, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Hamburg's magnificent Elbphilharmonie serves as the finals venue for this annual instrumental competition for musicians from Germany, Switzerland and Austria which, for its 10th instalment, is open to violinists aged 16-26. The finals featuring the TONALi Orchestra will be live-streamed

on the Elbphilharmonie website.

The First Prize is €10,000.

tonali.de

Top of the World International Piano Competition

Next competition:

June 19-25, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Open to pianists of all nationalities under 35, this competition takes place in Norway's midnight-sun city, Tromsø. This year's First Prize was €30,000 so there's everything to play for.

topoftheworld.no

International Singing Competition of Toulouse

Next competition: 2021

Application deadline: see website

Held in the city of Toulouse since 1954 and open to young singers aged between 18 and 32, participants are required to perform at least one piece by a French composer. Competition finalists are accompanied by the Toulouse Capitole Orchestra.

theatreducapitole.fr

Tromp International Percussion Competition

Next competition:

November 12-22, 2020

Application deadline: May 1, 2020

This biennial competition for solo percussionists aged 30 and under takes place within the Tromp Percussion Eindhoven Festival. All three winners receive a combination of cash and concert engagements. There's also a prize for the best interpretation of a composition by a Dutch composer.

tromppercussion.nl

International Henryk Wieniaski Violin Competition

Next competition:

October 9-22, 2021

Application deadline:

December 12, 2020

The 16th instalment of this major competition is open to violinists of all nationalities born between 1991 and 2006, with a First Prize on offer of €50,000. The winner of the first ever competition in 1935, pipping David Oistrakh to the post, was Ginette Neveu - so standards couldn't be higher.

wieniawski.com

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www.azrielifoundation.org/music



US & REST OF WORLD GUIDE



Honens International Piano Competition: Pavel Kolesnikov triumphs in 2012

Azrieli Music Prizes

Winners' Gala Concert:

October 2020

Application deadline: passed

Established in 2014 by the Azrieli Foundation, the biennial Azrieli Music Prizes offer opportunities for the discovery, creation, performance and celebration of excellence in music composition. Until now, there have been two prizes on offer: the Azrieli Prize for Jewish Music and the Azrieli Commission for Jewish Music. For 2020, however, which focuses on chamber music, a third has been added: the Azrieli Commission for Canadian Music, offered to a Canadian composer to create a work that engages with the challenges of composing concert music in Canada today.

azrielifoundation.org/our-priorities/music-arts/amp

Bradshaw & Buono International Piano Competition

Winners announced:

May 1, 2020

Application deadline: April 6, 2020

Unusually, this international competition open to solo pianists and piano ensembles (duo/four hands) has no live rounds. Instead it's all done by video selection, the prize being to perform in a prizewinners' concert at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. Each discipline is divided into the following

categories: middle school; high school; amateur adults aged 19 and over; and students pursuing music degrees in music and/or those who have already begun their careers.

alexanderbuono.com/piano-competition

Canadian International Organ Competition

Next competition:

October 6-18, 2020

Application deadline:

January 31, 2020

With the 2020 instalment open to organists born on or after October 17, 1985, this Montreal-based event is one of the world's largest international organ competitions, welcoming a maximum of 16 competitors to three competition rounds taking place in various Montreal churches. Prizes are valued at more than C\$125,000; First Prize is C\$25,000, plus the recording and distribution of a CD on ATMA Classique, three years of career management services, and a three-year career development programme.

ciocm.org

National Chopin Piano Competition of the United States

Next competition:

February 22 - March 1, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Under the auspices of the Chopin Foundation of the

United States, the Miami-based National Chopin Piano Competition for US pianists has been held every five years since 1975, and this year sees it raise its First Prize to \$100,000. The winner also receives an extensive US concert tour and is automatically allowed to compete in Warsaw's International Chopin Competition that same year, which is what happened to its 2015 winner Eric Lu (just 17 at the time), who, after gaining a respectable Fourth in Warsaw, went on to win at Leeds in 2018. Second Prize also serves as a passport to Warsaw, together with a cash prize of \$30,000, while the winner of the Third Prize plus all other finalists have their expenses paid to compete in the Warsaw preliminary round. For non-participants, there's an extensive concert programme in Miami that's open to the public. In addition, for those unable to attend in person, the entire competition will be live-streamed.

chopin.org

Cleveland International Piano Competition

Next competition:

July 26 - August 9, 2020

Application deadline: December 17 (late fee after November 26)

Open to pianists aged between 18 and 32, the biennial CIPC counts amongst its past prizewinners Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Nicholas Angelich and Angela Hewitt. Its next crop of hopefuls will compete for the Mixon First Prize of \$75,000, a New York debut, management services, and a recording on the Steinway & Sons label. Large portions of the competition will be streamed online, so keep an eye on the website.

clevelandpiano.org

Concert Artists Guild Victor Elmaleh Competition

Next competition: October 2020

Application deadline: April 2020

New York's Concert Artists Guild

has been helping young artists launch their concert careers since 1951, and the package of prizes on offer for winners of its annual competition - which focuses on a different cluster of disciplines each year - reflects that: management support, a New York showcase performance as part of the CAG Presents series, concert bookings, opportunities through the CAG Commissioning Programme and CAG Records label, and professional career development and coaching. It's especially attractive, then, if you're a young artist wishing to raise your profile in the US (indeed, artists with existing North America-based management aren't eligible to apply). Notable past alumni include violinists Jennifer Koh and Joseph Lin of the Juilliard Quartet. The final at New York's Merkin Concert Hall will be live-streamed on CAG's Facebook page.

concertartists.org/competition

Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition

Next competition:

July 16-25, 2020

Application deadline:

April 15, 2020

A joint venture between Ohio's Oberlin Conservatory of Music and the Cleveland Orchestra, this annual competition is open to accomplished young musicians aged 13-18, and alternates annually between the piano and violin. The 2020 competition, for piano, has a jury chaired by the competition's Director Robert Shannon and is awarding seven cash prizes including a First of \$20,000. This is also one you can catch large portions of remotely, because all the semi-final rounds as well as the recital finals at Oberlin will be streamed live via the Cooper Competition website. The concerto finals at Cleveland's Severance Hall, meanwhile, will be broadcast and streamed live

October 6-19, 2020

Canadian International Organ Competition

Application forms, rules, and further info at www.ciocm.org

  #CIOC2020

www.ciocm.org

1st prize: \$25,000 + solo CD recording (ATMA Classique) and three-year career management and professional development with Karen McFarlane Artists and the CIOC.

2nd prize: \$15,000

3rd prize: \$10,000

In total, over \$125,000 in prizes.

The Competition is open to all organists born after October 17, 1985.

Deadline for the Preliminary Round is January 31, 2020 (date of postmark).

Travel, lodging, and incidental expenses are covered by the CIOC for all selected competitors.

WASHINGTON
INTERNATIONAL
COMPETITION

2020 WIC for Piano
May 23 & 24, 2020
Washington D.C.

In its 67th year, this year's Washington International Competition's judges are Simone Dinnerstein, Robert McDonald and John Perry.

Application Now Open:
www.getacceptd.com/wic

Application Deadline: February 15, 2020

\$22,000 in Prize Awards

Performance awards include a recital in the Kennedy Center and a performance with the Avanti Orchestra.

For more information: wicpiano2020@gmail.com

Open to pianists ages 18 - 30
Regulations and repertoire listed at www.fmmcfoundation.org

The Washington International Competition (WIC) is sponsored by the Friday Morning Music Club Foundation.



WARING INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION

Senior Competition (18-30 years old)

March 2021

Palm Desert, California USA

Solo and Concerto Divisions

Application Deadline: Oct. 15, 2020

Application materials and other details after Oct. 2019 at www.vwipc.org / 760-773-2575

Over \$30,000 in prize money plus performance opportunities



on WCLV 104.9FM and wclv.org, Cleveland's classical music station. oberlin.edu/cooper

Guitar Foundation of America International Convention and Competitions

Next competition:

June 22-27, 2020

Application deadline: see website

The Guitar Foundation of America's annual International Convention features three competitions: the International Concert Artist Competition (ICAC), the International Youth Competition (IYC) and the International Ensemble Competition (IEC). The largest is the ICAC, open to all guitarists who are aged 18 or over by June 1, 2020. The coveted Rose Augustin Grand Prize includes \$10,000, a Naxos CD recording and a GFA-sponsored international concert tour comprising approximately 50 concerts throughout the US, Canada and Mexico. All the rounds are live-streamed.

guitarfoundation.org

Michael Hill International Violin Competition

Next competition: June 4-13, 2021

Application deadline:

November 1, 2020

This competition for violinists aged between 18 and 28 stands out, not just because it's New Zealand-based, but because of the array of prizes awarded to the overall winner: in addition to NZ\$40,000, he or she receives a five-week 'pressure-cooker experience' Winner's Tour of New Zealand and Australia comprising recitals, a concerto and a recording on the Atoll Label. The winner also receives a designer outfit and a Christine Hill pendant. There are plans to live-stream all events in 2021.

michaelhillviolincompetition.co.nz

Honens International Piano Competition

Next competition:

October 14-22, 2021

Application deadline:

October 30, 2020

This major triennial Canadian

competition for pianists aged between 20 and 30 carries a First Prize of C\$100,000, plus an artistic and career development programme valued at \$500,000. Two other finalists each receive \$10,000.

honens.com

International Conducting Competition for Chinese Music

Next competition:

June 26 - July 4, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Launched by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra in 2011 with a focus on Chinese orchestral music, it offers a top prize of US\$15,000, and the final takes the form of a public concert.

hkco.org

Kobe International Flute Competition

Next competition:

August 26 - September 5, 2021

Application deadline: see website

Established in 1985 and held every four years, this is one of the rare competitions dedicated to the flute alone, and carries generous cash prizes. Further information on the 2021 edition will appear online next spring.

kobe-flute.jp

Menuhin Competition

Next competition:

May 14-24, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Richmond, Virginia, is the city for the 2020 edition of this biennial violin competition. It has a strong track record for picking talents (such as its 2008 winner Ray Chen, sitting on this year's jury) – particularly impressive considering its low age restrictions: under 22 for its main senior section, and under 16 for its prestigious junior category (Alina Ibragimova took Second Prize in 2000). Prizes include a senior First of \$20,000 plus a two-year loan of a golden-period Stradivarius violin, and a junior First of \$10,000 plus a two-year loan of a fine old Italian violin. Two prizewinners, one senior, one junior, also get to perform at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival 2021.

menuhincompetition.org

Concours Musical International de Montréal

Next competition: May 3-14, 2020

Application deadline: passed

This annual competition presents three disciplines – voice, violin, piano – in rotation, each instalment offering, to 24 competitors, recital and concert rounds, masterclasses, advice from a leading jury, and a share of C\$150,000 in prize money and grants. None other than Beatrice Rana won First Prize in 2011, so hopes are high for the 2020 piano competition.

concoursmontreal.ca

Elmar Oliveira International Violin Competition

Next competition:

January 14-26, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Held on the Boca Raton campus of the Lynn University Conservatory of Music in Florida and open to violinists aged between 16 and 32, the EOIVC is only the second competition of its kind solely dedicated to the violin in the US. New for EOIVC 2020 is the creation of a Community Engagement Award which involves competitors giving a 45-minute interactive presentation to children aged eight to 11 at the Plumosa School of the Arts. As for the main competition, the First Prize recipient wins \$30,000 plus worldwide performance bookings, community engagement opportunities and career support; he or she will also receive a violin, bow and Musafia case. Catch the finals on the EOIVC Facebook page and via the event's YouTube channel.

elmaroliveiraivc.org

Osaka International Chamber Music Competition

Next competition:

May 15-22, 2020

Application deadline: passed

Organised by the Japan Chamber Music Foundation, this triennial event for under-35s aims to 'enhance the appeal of chamber music'. It was established in 1992 and carries a First Prize of ¥3m. There are two categories: Section 1 features

the string quartet, while Section 2 focuses on the piano trio or piano quartet. The jury is impressive: it's chaired by Suntory Arts Foundation Director General Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, and includes former Belcea Quartet cellist and now YCAT Chief Executive and Artistic Director Alasdair Tait, former Tokyo Quartet violinist Martin Beaver, and Trio Wanderer pianist Vincent Coq. There's also one further distinctive strand in the form of the 'Festa', open to ensembles of two or more, specialising in all genres of music from classical to ethnic to traditional, with no restrictions regarding age or musical instruments. The professional jury will be chaired by pianist Toshikazu Umemoto but will also include selected members of the public audience, chosen beforehand. All the competition and festa performances are to be live-streamed on the competition's website.

jcmf.or.jp

Arthur Rubenstein International Piano Master Competition

Next competition: May 5-21, 2020

Application deadline: passed

This Tel Aviv-based competition is for pianists aged between 18 and 32. Its first ever winner was Emanuel Ax in 1974, while Daniil Trifonov was a more recent winner in 2011. Pianists on the jury this year, chaired by Arie Vardi, include Craig Sheppard and Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. The gold medallist receives \$40,000, the silver medallist wins \$20,000 and the bronze winner gets \$15,000. In addition, there are various other cash prizes up for grabs as well as recording and concert opportunities.

arims.org.il

Alice and Eleonore Schoenfeld International String Competition

Next competition:

July 15-29, 2020

Application deadline:

April 15, 2020

As impressive settings go, it's hard to beat this biennial

SCHOENFELD INTERNATIONAL STRING COMPETITION



Member of the World Federation
of International Music Competitions

VIOLIN . CELLO . CHAMBER MUSIC

HARBIN · CHINA
JULY 2020 *15-29*

Founder

Alice Schoenfeld

Artistic Director

Suli Xue

Total Award Prize

USD 160,000

Chair

Jean-Jacques Kantorow

Arto Noras

Application Deadline:

April 15, 2020

schoenfeldcompetition.com



Chinese competition, because its headline venue is Harbin's striking Grand Theater, seemingly sculpted by wind and water, alongside Harbin Conservatory of Music. Supported by the century-old Harbin Symphony Orchestra, the competition is split into three categories: violinists under the age of 32, and cellists, again under 32, who compete for a top prize of \$30,000; and then chamber groups aged between 17 and 35, limited to repertoire for piano trio, piano quartet or string quartet, who stand to win \$20,000. This year's candidates are playing to a jury headed up by French violinist and conductor Jean-Jacques Kantorow and Finnish cellist Arto Noras. Partnering the competition is the second Schoenberg International Arts Leaders' Summit, presenting industry discussions on string playing and young talent. For those who can't make it to Harbin, the competition has partnered with Amadeus.tv for video streaming, and with Idagio for audio streaming.

schoenfeldcompetition.com

China Shenzhen International Piano Concerto Competition

Next competition:
November 1-13, 2020
Application deadline: May 1, 2020
Previous winners of this triennial Shenzhen competition include Zuo Zhang, Mariya Kim and Galina Chistiakova. Finalists are given the opportunity to perform with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra under Daye Lin who was appointed its Music Director and Chief Conductor in 2016. The top prizes are \$30,000, \$20,000 and \$15,000, and there are also concert engagements to be won with major Chinese symphony orchestras. Members of the jury, under the honorary chairmanship of Zhou Guangren include Michael Beroff, Gabriel Kwok, Yoheved Kaplinsky and Piers Lane.

csipcc.com.cn

Singapore International Violin Competition

Next competition:
January 17-29, 2021
Application deadline: see website
This triennial competition gives all its emerging violinists the opportunity to perform in major Singapore venues such as Esplanade Concert Hall and Victoria Concert Hall before a high-calibre jury and a live audience, both local and global: the competition is generously streaming not only the finals and 'grand final' but also the first rounds and semi-finals. Note, in addition, that the competition's array of prizes is striking for the fact that, as well as more than \$110,000 in cash prizes alongside concert engagements, each of the six finalists will receive a three-year loan of a rare instrument from the Rin Collection. We are not aware of any other competition loaning fine instruments to such a high number of candidates.

singaporeviolincompetition.com

Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition

Next competition:
August 4-25, 2020
Application deadline:
January 20, 2020
The long list of prizes on offer at this major Shanghai competition include a First of \$100,000, and \$10,000 for Best Chinese Work Performance. There's also a very special prize on the table: the Isaac Stern Human Spirit Award (again \$10,000), which is given to an individual from any field and from any part of the world who is deemed to have made an outstanding contribution to our understanding of humanity through the medium of music. Beyond the Co-Chairs (conductor and Opera Fuoco founder David Stern and violinist Vera Tsu Weiling), the jury includes Philharmonie de Paris Director Emmanuel Hondré, violinists Maxim Vengerov, Glenn Dicterow, Philip Setzer and Ning Feng, and



Michael Hill International Violin Competition: the 16 quarter-finalists from this year

Askonas Holt agency founder Martin Campbell-White. Another stand-out feature for 2020 is a post-competition gala on the final night, in celebration of the centenary of Isaac Stern's birth and linking to the documentary *From Mao to Mozart*. This will feature performances by selected laureates from all three SISIVC editions, as well as several musicians Stern coached in the documentary, including another one of the jurors, Jian Wang. Remote viewing options are good, with live streaming planned on both the SISIVC website and its Facebook page, and on the Violin Channel Facebook page.

shcompetition.com/en

Tokyo International Conducting Competition

Next competition: 2021
Application deadline: see website
This triennial competition, established in 1966 with the aim of discovering and supporting outstanding musical talent, has some notable laureates, such as Corinna Niemeyer who took Third in 2015, and Nodoka Okisawa, who in 2018 caused a sensation when she became the first Japanese to win in 18 years. All rounds take place at Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall; the applicants conduct the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra in the first and second preliminary rounds, and the New Japan Philharmonic Orchestra in the final. Among the cash prizes is a top award of ¥2m.

conductingtokyo.org

Unisa International Piano Competition

Next competition:
January 21 - February 1, 2020
Application deadline: passed
This international piano competition, based in Pretoria, South Africa, is open to both classical and jazz pianists aged 30 and under. First Prize for both categories is R220,000. For all successful applicants, the competition will take care of flights and accommodation, plus cover the costs of meals, practice facilities and transport.

unisa.ac.za

Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

Next competition:
May 27 - June 12, 2021
Application deadline:
October 15, 2020
Established in 1962 and named after the American pianist who in 1958 became the winner of Russia's first ever Tchaikovsky Competition at the height of the Cold War, the Van Cliburn runs every four years in Fort Worth, Texas, and is open to pianists aged between 18 and 30. As far as piano competitions (and indeed US-based competitions) go, it's one of the most prestigious in the world, as is reflected by the fact that the 2021 Chairman of the Jury is Marin Alsop, who also conducts the final round with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra. Past laureates include Radu Lupu, who won in 1966, and Beatrice Rana, who took Silver in 2013 at the age of just 20.

cliburn.org

Critics' Choice 2019

*Our critics each choose a favourite recording from the past 12 months.
If you're after the perfect gift guide for Christmas, look no further!*

Mike Ashman

R Strauss Also sprach Zarathustra. Tod und Verklärung. Till Eulenspiegel, etc

Lucerne Fest Orch / Riccardo Chailly

Decca 483 3080 (11/19)



The Strauss who once declared an ambition to be the Offenbach of the 20th century would be proud of these performances. With his newly shaped

Lucerne ensemble, Chailly achieves a remarkable degree of lyrical flexibility and reflection, wholly free of the bombast especially associated with this repertoire on record. An essential, but never less than compelling, palate-cleanser.



Andrew Achenbach

Stenhammar Serenade, Op 31.

Symphony No 2

Gothenburg SO / Herbert Blomstedt

BIS BIS2424 (2/19)



Gloriously unforced, wise and humane music-making. To the wholly captivating Serenade Herbert Blomstedt and his exemplary Gothenburg

orchestra impart a delectable grace, disarming sense of wonder, songful glow and beaming affection, while the performance of the magnificent Second Symphony evinces both architectural splendour and majestic control. An altogether special release.

Tim Ashley

'Poèmes d'un jour'

Stéphane Degout bar **Simon Lepper** pf

B Records LBM017 (5/19)



French baritone Stéphane Degout makes his first foray into Lieder in this powerhouse recital with Simon Lepper, recorded

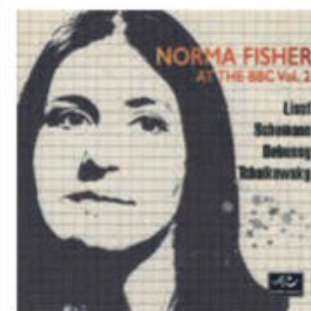
live, in a single take, in Paris in December 2017. He sings Brahms like one born to it, and his performance of Schumann's Op 35 *Kerner Lieder* is the most gripping that I know.



Michelle Assay

Norma Fisher, Vol 2

Sonetto Classics SONCLA004 (11/19)



It might seem unimaginative for me to nominate Norma Fisher for the second year running. But as soon as I think of any of the other excellent recordings I have

reviewed this year, hers (Vol 2 in the series of remastered recordings for the BBC, and featuring music by Debussy, Liszt, Schumann, André Tchaikowsky and others) still stands out for depth of understanding, natural poetic eloquence and pianistic finesse.



Richard Bratby

Kálmán Ein Herbstmanöver
Sols; Giessen PO / Michael Hofstetter
 Oehms OC977 (7/19)



Operetta is like goulash: there's no definitive recipe, but you know when it tastes right. This spirited new recording of Kálmán's 1908 'military

operetta' makes a few tweaks to the original, but it's lively, fresh, and has that authentic Viennese-Hungarian paprika tang. Huge fun, done with huge style: it's rarely been off my CD player.

Rob Cowan

Bruckner Symphony No 9
Pittsburgh SO / Manfred Honeck
 Reference Recordings FR733 (see page 68)

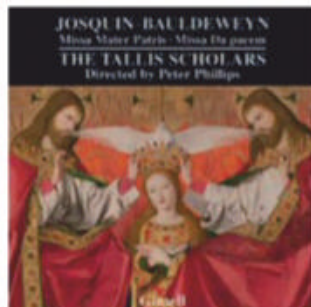


The slow movement is the thing: broad in the manner of Furtwängler and Jochum, beautifully phrased, and captured in astonishingly vivid

sound. As an ex-violist player with the Vienna Philharmonic, Honeck will have had this music in his blood for years; he grasps its rhetoric from the inside, scales its heights with confidence and understands its nobility.

Edward Breen

Josquin Missa Mater Patris
Bauldeweyn Missa Da pacem
The Tallis Scholars / Peter Phillips
 Gimell CDGIM052 (11/19)



The clear, bright sound of The Tallis Scholars is always a superb match for Josquin's complex textures and their control of two-part textures is

outstanding. In this later work the ensemble infuse their trademark brilliance with warmer tones that bind Josquin's music in new ways. A superb addition to their ongoing Josquin cycle.

Jed Distler

Wagner Der Ring des Nibelungen
Sols; Hong Kong PO / Jaap van Zweden
 Naxos 8 501403 (7/19)



Jaap van Zweden and the Hong Kong PO fuse Solti's energy, Karajan's chamber aesthetic, Böhm's impetuosity, Goodall's detailed gravitas and Keilberth's vivid

scene-building to forge a freshly minted, standard-setting and sonically beguiling *Ring* cycle. Furthermore, Matthias Goerne's Wotan is the best since James Morris and Hans Hotter.

Alexandra Coghlan

'Anamorfosi'
Le Poème Harmonique / Vincent Dumestre
 Alpha ALPHA438 (A/19)



Think you never need to hear another recording of Allegri's *Miserere*? Think again. The exhilarating sense of irreverence and play – both in programming and

performance – is just one of many reasons to fall for this recording. Colliding sacred and secular to giddy effect, painting traditionally soft Renaissance pastels in bold modern shades, Dumestre and his crack team of musicians make you see and hear afresh.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Beethoven Cello Sonatas
Leonard Elschenbroich *vc* **Alexei Grynyuk** *pf*
 Onyx ONYX4196 (6/19)



A thrilling rediscovery for me of Beethoven's cello sonatas. Elschenbroich and Grynyuk give shape, direction and meaning to every phrase, while

remaining scrupulously attentive to each score's details. Their riveting performances had me marvelling afresh at what astonishingly inventive and subtly daring works these are.

David Fanning

Weinberg Symphonies Nos 2 and 21
CBSO; Kremerata Baltica / Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla
 DG 483 6566 (6/19)



On paper, as I first got to know it, Mieczysław Weinberg's Symphony No 21 was gravely impressive. In the hands of the CBSO, Kremerata Baltica and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla it is a revelation. The composer, who only lived to see the earliest shoots of his rediscovery in the West, would have been dumbstruck.





CD-BOOK HMM 902414.15

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Leonore (1805)

MARLIS PETERSEN, MAXIMILIAN SCHMITT
DIMITRY IVASHCHENKO, ROBIN JOHANNSEN
JOHANNES WEISSER, TAREQ NAZMI, JOHANNES CHUM

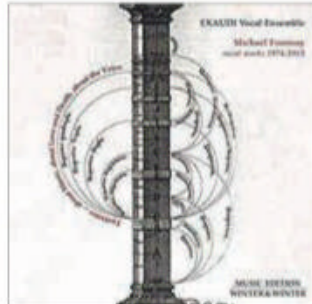
FREIBURGER BAROCKORCHESTER
ZÜRCHER SING-AKADEMIE
RENÉ JACOBS

Fabrice Fitch

Finnissy Vocal Works 1974-2015

Exaudi Vocal Ensemble

Winter & Winter 910 246-2 (1/19)



Exaudi's new recording of Finnissy's choral music ranges from the early *Tom Fool's Wooing* to a recent cycle inspired by late Gesualdo, which

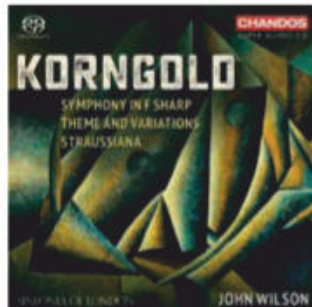
Exaudi have since followed up with a superb survey of those very madrigals. When I reviewed it early in the year I thought it would take some beating, and so it has proved.

David Gutman

Korngold Symphony in F sharp, etc

Sinfonia of London / John Wilson

Chandos CHSA5220 (10/19)



This classiest of Korngold anthologies demands pride of place. The identity of individual players is not divulged, save that of leader Andrew Haveron, but John

Wilson's reimagined Sinfonia of London emerges as a session orchestra to surpass even Charles Gerhardt's legendary National Philharmonic. The Symphony in F sharp is gloriously retooled. Might the *Symphonic Serenade* be next?

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Bach family Cantatas

Vox Luminis / Lionel Meunier

Ricercar RIC401 (8/19)



Is there a modern 'early-music' ensemble with quite so many rapt, ravishing and rhetorically convincing recordings of late?

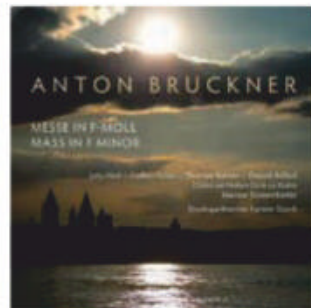
Vox Luminis's open-hearted enquiry into four top Bachs – great uncle, two old cousins and their pupil, JSB – brings resonating meaning to the young man's finest early masterpiece, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*. Ecstatic listening.

Christian Hoskins

Bruckner Mass No 3

Sols; Choirs and Orchestra of Mainz Cathedral / Karsten Storck

Rondeau Production ROP6161 (2/19)



Nothing I've heard this year has impressed more than this account of Bruckner's F minor Mass. Karsten Storck communicates the sublimity and grandeur of the music with such conviction that I'm almost persuaded it's Bruckner's greatest achievement. It's a recording I've returned to with undiminished pleasure many times over.

Charlotte Gardner

Beethoven String Quartets, Op 59 Nos 1 & 2

Ébène Qt

Erato 9029 53960-2 (11/19)



There's been an additional spark and sense of superglued unity to Quatuor Ébène's usual clean class and vim since the arrival of their newest member, the

viola player Marie Chilleme. It's highly palpable on stage, and equally it's radiating from the lived-in performances on this first instalment of their live-recorded Beethoven string quartet cycle. Exciting times.

Richard Lawrence

Dufay Lament for Constantinople

The Orlando Consort

Hyperion CDA68236 (5/19)



I'm going to beat the drum for an Awards runner-up this year, this magnificent selection of secular pieces by Dufay. It starts with a moving lament for the fall of Constantinople and ends with a drinking song. Four male voices, no instruments, offer 70 minutes of fascination and delight.

Lindsay Kemp

Bach Violin Concertos, etc

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin /

Isabelle Faust vn

Harmonia Mundi HMM90 2335/6 (4/19)



I found Isabelle Faust's two-disc set with the Akademie für Alte Musik of the Bach violin concertos, plus reconstructions of others and some

delightful violiniana from the cantatas, an uplifting encounter with music familiar and unfamiliar. Top-class musicianship, real joy in the music – I'm sure I could feel old Bach smiling on.



Andrew Mellor

Schumann Cello Concerto, etc
Sol Gabetta vc **Bertrand Chamayou** *fp*
Basel CO / Giovanni Antonini
Sony Classical 88985 35227-2 (2/19)



Subtle beauties abound on this album. The most obvious lie in the way the works are ordered – Schumann working his way up towards his Cello Concerto through degrees of emotional exploration and instability. The playing is the very opposite of grand. The instruments, particularly Gabetta's cellos and Chamayou's fortepiano, sound with a savoury tenderness.

Mark Pullinger

'Baïka'
Nemanja Radulović *vn*
Borusan Istanbul PO / Sascha Goetzel
DG 479 7545GH (3/19)



Unfashionable it may be, but I've a soft spot for Aram Khachaturian's Violin Concerto, which received a terrific recording on Nemanja

Radulović's album 'Baïka'. He is a charismatic performer – leathers and knee-high boots – but it's not all flashy double-stopping; Radulović finds real poetry in the concerto's more reflective moments.

Ivan Moody

Tavener 'Angels'
Winchester Cathedral Choir / Andrew Lumsden
Hyperion CDA68255 (5/19)



This recording is a testimony to John Tavener's long association with the choir of Winchester Cathedral, who perform a selection of pieces from throughout the composer's career with unerring accuracy and sublime musicality. A bonus is the personal dimension achieved by the inclusion of a booklet note by the choir's former director, Martin Neary.

Peter Quantrill

Byrd The Great Service
Odysean Ensemble / Colm Carey
Linn CKD608 (6/19)



Given its unassailable stature, William Byrd's *Great Service* is curiously under-recorded. Colm Carey and the Odysean Ensemble establish the entire sequence of canticles among the masterpieces of European polyphony with singing as bold and gutsy as it is polished, and direction that lives up to the grandeur of Byrd's vision.

Richard Osborne

Rossini Il barbiere di Siviglia
Sols; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie; Unikanti / Jérémie Rhorer
Naxos NBD0065V (see page 119)



Laurent Pelly's Théâtre des Champs-Élysées staging of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, expertly cast and superbly conducted, is the finest I have seen as a realisation of Rossini's radical, life-enhancing marriage of music, text and theatre. Here's a well from which Molière, Beaumarchais himself, Feydeau and Tati have already drawn copious draughts.

Guy Rickards

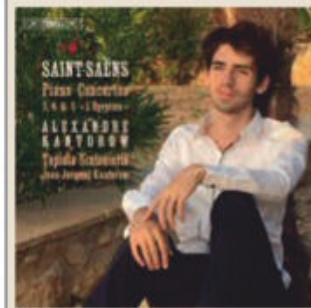
Rosner Orchestral Works, Vol 3
LPO / Nick Palmer
Toccata Classics TOCC0469 (5/19)



Two Toccata Classics recordings vied for top choice this year: the third volume of Arnold Rosner's orchestral music and Steve Elcock's chamber pieces played by the Veles Ensemble (4/19). Wonderful as this latter is, the London Philharmonic's scintillating accounts of Rosner's monumental Sixth Symphony and Nocturne are irresistible.

Jeremy Nicholas

Saint-Saëns Piano Concertos Nos 3-5
Alexandre Kantorow *pf* **Tapiola Sinfonietta / Jean-Jacques Kantorow**
BIS BIS2300 (6/19)



Unavoidably, having championed Bertrand Chamayou's Recording of the Year, it's another Saint-Saëns concerto album that is my choice. The

commanding ease and infectious delight that Alexandre Kantorow brings to these three concertos is utterly irresistible, aided and abetted by Kantorow *père*, the Tapiola players and superb sound engineering.



PHOTOGRAPHY: TAPIOLA SINFONIETTA

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(Xenia Jankovic, from liner notes)

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Ludwig van Beethoven
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'The Hamlet Piano Trio boasts performances that shine with confidence and immediacy.'

– Gramophone

Felix Mendelssohn
Opus 49 & 66

piano: Erard 1837

Cellist Xenia Jankovic, violinist Candida Thompson and pianist Paolo Giacometti, are three world-class musicians that join forces as the Hamlet Piano Trio. All three have earned their stripes, both as soloists and as chamber musicians.

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ANDREW MCGREGOR, BBC RADIO 3

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KATE BOLTON-PORCIATTI, BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE
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RICHARD TURBET, EARLY MUSIC REVIEW

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Vladimir Jurowski

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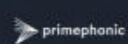
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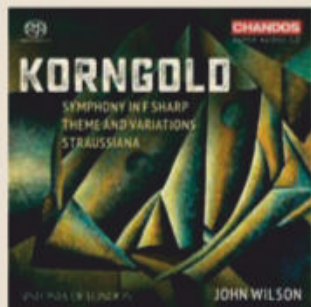


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Edward Seckerson

Korngold Symphony in F sharp, etc
Sinfonia of London / John Wilson
 Chandos CHSA5220 (10/19)



John Wilson's Hollywood sojourns have undoubtedly contributed to the stylistic rightness of this disc. The Sinfonia of London embrace the

Symphony like Korngold must have dreamt Vienna would on his homecoming in 1954 when he found himself so dramatically out of step with the prevailing winds of change. Urgency, reach and an indescribable yearning are its hallmarks – delivered here in spades.



Malcolm Riley

Tabakova Choral Works
Truro Cathedral Choir; BBC Concert Orchestra / Christopher Gray
 Regent REGCD530 (10/19)



My summer listening was greatly enhanced by the latest recording from Regent, made in the glowing acoustic of Truro's lovely cathedral, a

deeply impressive survey of choral music by Dobrinka Tabakova. Christopher Gray draws sumptuous performances from his various choirs and the BBC Concert Orchestra. The standout track is *Kynance Cove*.

Marc Rochester

'Bach to the Future'
Olivier Latry *pf*
 La Dolce Vita LDV69 (6/19)



Cast your minds back to April 15 and that terrible fire in Paris's Notre-Dame. For a while it seemed as if the cathedral's famous organ had been lost, so it was

fortuitous that Olivier Latry had just recorded this stupendous album. As we now know, the organ lives to be heard again, but this fiery recording still presents the instrument in a spectacular blaze of colour. Bach is well served too!

Patrick Rucker

Liszt Études d'exécution transcendante, S139
Andrey Gugnin *pf*
 Piano Classics PCL10158 (3/19)

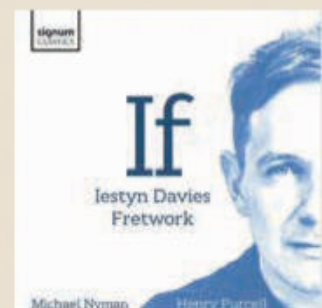


2019 saw many outstanding piano recordings but my favourite, hands down, has been Andrey Gugnin's mighty traversal of Liszt's

Transcendental Études. This set goes way beyond dazzling technique, though there's plenty of that. Impeccable musicality, a richly evocative imagination and sheer poetic eloquence put Gugnin in a class by himself.

Mark Seow

Nyman. Purcell 'If'
Iestyn Davies *countertenor* **Fretwork**
 Signum SIGCD586 (5/19)



A haunting meeting of minimalism and the Baroque. The soundtrack of my spring, this collaboration between the viol consort Fretwork

and the countertenor Iestyn Davies leaves one bewitched for days. Davies's voice is hypnotically pure, surrounded by the mechanical churn of viols. A recording that possesses all the wonderment and spellbound danger encapsulated in that two-letter word.



Hugo Shirley

Janáček *The Diary of One who Disappeared*, etc
Nicky Spence *ten* **Julius Drake** *pf* et al
 Hyperion CDA68282 (8/19)

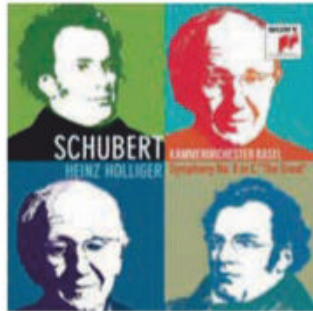


Christian Gerhaher's 'Frage' (2/19) is clearly a top choice for 2019, but Nicky Spence's superb Janáček album – featuring a hauntingly eloquent and moving

performance of *The Diary of One who Disappeared* – was perhaps even more revelatory, with the tenor on brilliantly communicative form, supported by fiercely dramatic playing from Julius Drake.

David Threasher

Schubert *Symphony No 9*
Basel CO / Heinz Holliger
 Sony Classical 19075 81438-2 (2/19)



This year has been a good one for Schubert's symphonies, with *Great C* majors from a range of backgrounds and approaches

appearing and reappearing. A new one from the Scottish CO under Maxim Emelyanychev is gripping and provocative but there's something equally absorbing about Heinz Holliger's cycle-launching recording with the Basel Chamber Orchestra.

Pŵyll ap Siôn

Reich 'Live at Fondation Louis Vuitton'
Colin Currie Group
 Colin Currie Records CCRO003 (6/19)



Following on from their vibrant and colourful recording of Steve Reich's *Drumming* in 2018, the Colin Currie Group harness rhythmic energy

with expressive power on this live recording from Fondation Louis Vuitton. Joined by Synergy Vocals in a beautiful, haunting rendition of *Proverb*, it's a recording that showcases Reich at his very best.

David Vickers

Handel *Samson*
Dunedin Consort / John Butt
 Linn CKD599 (see page 104)



It is unprecedented for an unabridged *Samson* to nail its enigmatic challenges. Butt captures the manifold musical details, incremental theatrical tensions,

literary subtleties and emotional trajectory of Handel's long, ambitious and complex oratorio. The responsive orchestra and singers of the Dunedin Consort (whether heard in small or large choir configurations) perform with marvellous quality and conviction.

Harriet Smith

Beethoven *Piano Sonatas Nos 30-32*
Steven Osborne *pf*
 Hyperion CDA68219 (5/19)



Steven Osborne proves that he is the ideal modern-day Beethovenian, utterly at one with the composer. He conjures the different worlds of each of the

last three sonatas with imagination, daring and a tremendous sense of engagement that allow him to make this music entirely his own. Miss it if you dare.

Richard Whitehouse

'Hommage à Rădulescu'
Ortwin Stürmer *pf*
 Neos NEOS11805/7 (5/19)



Horațiu Rădulescu (1942-2008) was a singular figure in post-war European music. The six piano sonatas are a valuable overview of his

legacy, harmonic innovation and the Romanian folk tradition rendered in the context of virtuoso pianism. Ortwin Stürmer plays these, and the panoramic Piano Concerto, with fearless commitment and is recorded with tangible realism.

David Patrick Stearns

'Si j'ai aimé'
Sandrine Piau *sop* **Le Concert de la Loge**
 Alpha ALPHA445 (8/19)



The discovery of orchestral songs by composers Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Dubois and Guillemant isn't causing great musicological ripples

but adds much-needed charm to our world as sung here by Sandrine Piau. Her voice is clean and lovely as ever, used with unaffected honesty that gives words maximum directness. The low-vibrato approach of *Le Concert de la Loge* guards against overselling the music's fragility.



Arnold Whittall

Tippett Symphonies Nos 3, 4 & B flat
BBC SO / Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion CDA68231/2 (4/19)



The 2019 BBC Proms included a collective celebration by British composers of the achievements – and the 60th birthday – of conductor Martyn Brabbins. The completion of Brabbins's Tippett symphony cycle, including the first recording of a fascinating early work, is further cause for celebration, and a timely reminder of this composer's special strengths.

Richard Wigmore

Handel Samson
Dunedin Consort / John Butt
Linn CKD599 (see page 104)



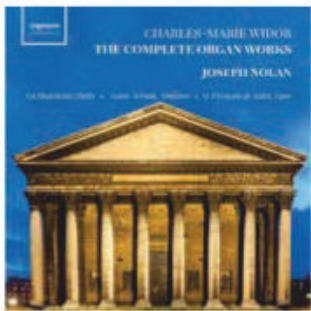
In another vintage year for Handel, Richard Egarr's revelatory recording of the *Brookes Passion* (7/11) vies with the new *Samson* from the Dunedin

Consort. Today, at least, I'm plumping for *Samson*: for its superb solo team, led by Joshua Ellicott and the Bevan sisters, its thrillingly immediate choral singing, and the mingled gravitas and theatrical urgency of John Butt's direction.



William Yeoman

Widor The Complete Organ Works
Joseph Nolan *org*
Signum SIGCD596 (A/19)



Having enjoyed each of the eight CDs comprising this set upon their original releases, the hackneyed phrase 'perfect Christmas gift' does spring to mind. But seriously, what sets Joseph Nolan's accounts apart from his competitors, for me, is a consistency of vision and brilliance of playing which feel so completely natural.

... AND FIVE CHOICES BY THE GRAMOPHONE TEAM TOO!

Martin Cullingford

'An English Coronation 1902-1953'
Gabrieli Consort & Players / Paul McCreesh
Signum SIGCD569 (6/19)



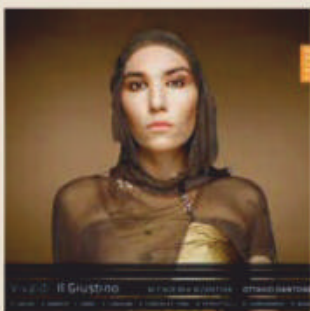
A project vast in its ambition, powerful in performance – and which back in June enabled me to print a full-page photograph

of Ely Cathedral's breathtaking Norman nave (see right). Paul McCreesh's reconstruction projects always feel like events; six months on, his celebration of the grandeur and grace, drama and dignity of the British coronation remains as moving as it is memorable.



James Jolly

Vivaldi *Il Giustino*
Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone
Naïve OP30571 (3/19)

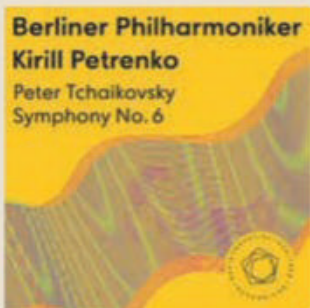


Intoxicated by our Young Artist of the Year Jakub Józef Orliński's singing of Vivaldi's aria 'Vedrò con mio diletto' from *Il Giustino* (Erato – to stream) and by

Joyce DiDonato's coolly jazzed-up take ('Songplay', Erato, 3/19), an exploration of the whole opera was a necessity. Cue Ottavio Dantone's magnificent new recording, with Delphine Galou in the title-role, a triumph on every level. Thrilling, enormously inventive music performed with total conviction!

Tim Parry

Tchaikovsky Symphony No 6 'Pathétique'
Berlin PO / Kirill Petrenko
Berliner Philharmoniker BPHR190261 (7/19)



If Teodor Currentzis's unique take on the *Pathétique* has a visceral intensity perhaps best experienced as a one-off, then Kirill Petrenko's first full

album with the Berlin Philharmonic is a performance to live with. Thrillingly characterised, immaculately detailed and superbly shaped, it burns with its own internal power and potency.

Sarah Kirkup

Sondheim Company
2018 London cast
Warner Classics 9362 49009-7 (6/19)



The gender-swapping cast of Marianne Elliott's triumphant London production knows how to honour Sondheim's

genius. The flawless Rosalie Craig lends an air of vulnerability to Bobbie's 'Being alive', Jonathan Bailey brings the house down as Jamie on the verge of a nervous breakdown in 'Getting married today', and Patti LuPone's 'Ladies who lunch' has just the right mix of insouciance and bitterness.

James McCarthy

Tavener The Protecting Veil
Sinfonietta Riga / Matthew Barley *vc*
Signum SIGCD585 (7/19)



I love music to envelop and engulf me. Matthew Barley's recording of John Tavener's *The Protecting Veil* offered me the most transformative

listening experience this year. The performance itself is breathtaking, but the engineering and production are so perfectly achieved that you can just lose yourself in Tavener's rapturous universe.



The Choir of King's College London, directed by Joseph Fort, offer a winning album of Advent Carols

Sing choirs of angels

Andrew Mellor looks to enter the seasonal spirit with a selection of this year's Christmas albums and finds that a traditional approach still often works best

For centuries,' writes Owain Park in the booklet note to his ensemble's Yuletide offering, 'Christmas and the surrounding seasons have inspired composers to new heights of invention.' I wouldn't dream of shooting his observation down. But I would add that while the sentence is completely true, you could substitute the word 'invention' with 'crudeness', 'populism' or 'ineeloquence' and it would be rendered even truer.

Yes, it's that time of year again – Park titles his disc **Christmas**, just in case there were any doubt – and once more we are reminded what treacherous ground the

seasonal album lays down for those brave enough to venture on to it.

For Park and The Gesualdo Six, it all goes so well ... up to a point. 'Christmas' has two of those most elusive qualities for seasonal albums: cohesion of repertoire and a sense of identity – a through line (again, up to a point). Park talks of the 'wonder and reflection' of the festive season and his disc harbours it. Philip Lawson's arrangement of *Veni Emmanuel* does that quintessentially Christmassy thing of plugging into a timeless, universal language; the ensemble even comes close to rescuing *Gaudete* from Alan Partridge crassness. So many of the

repertoire decisions are astute ones. Thomas Tallis deserves to be followed by Jonathan Harvey and vice versa. Praetorius, Hassler and Handl sit well with Holst, Vaughan Williams and top-end *a cappella* Rutter.

But we know by now that it's near impossible for male church singers from the south of England to make a Christmas disc without indulging a curious fetish for close harmony. Park's own *On the infancy of our Saviour* places a straw boater atop a poignant poem. The music drips with passé suspensions and added notes, and is bereft of originality. Ditto Jonathan Rathbone's *The Oxen*. Just to make sure the atmosphere of 'wonder and reflection' has been blown to smithereens, they end with a rendition of *Jingle Bells* that would scream 'irony' even in a New York Christmas movie circa 1984.

In vocal tone, The Gesualdo Six might be described as a sort of English Cinquecento, with a smooth rather than grainy sound that hangs down from the countertenors rather than building up from the basses. We get a good amount of alto-tenor-bass singing on **Christmas at St George's Windsor** from the castle's chapel choir, directed by James Vivian. But where Park's group fills its advent polyphony with that all-important sense of expectation, the men of St George's sound overly reverential, more dim than glowing. The countertenor sound is hooty and there's insufficient transformation when the boys enter the frame. Gardner's seasonal classic *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* shuffles along as if there was too much dancing the night before.

The album is divided into three stages (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany) but there's no discernible aural differentiation and there's insufficient establishment of one or more of what are, in my book, Christmas album essentials: mystery, joy, timelessness or communal warmth.

The album leads us into another Christmas repertoire danger zone. Yes, there are some gems: Rheinberger's *Rorate caeli*, Madden's *Watts' Cradle Song* (a proper carol) and Bullard's *The gracious gift* (you could do worse than download all three individually). Then comes an acute case of a composer putting himself before the music, before the message, before the season and before the congregation. David Briggs's reimagining of *Away in a manger* is determined to smother the simple, well-known tune with Francophile trappings that make lots of points about style but none about Christmas. I don't want to hear this simple English carol filtered through a Marcel Dupré pastiche in overdrive any more than I want to sit down to turkey bourguignon.

Not long after that, Matthew Martin's *Nowell sing we* proves that you're on shaky ground if you want to write a traditional dance-based carol but don't have a corking, memorable tune on which to hang it. Roxanna Panufnik has all sorts of solutions. Her *Angels Sing* is a tonic and doesn't outstay its welcome, using devices that rise above the hackneyed and are deployed with a joyous smile and teasing excitement.

That piece appears on **Now May We Sing** from the Choir of Westminster

School, which admittedly falls short of those four criteria set out above – particularly on 'communal warmth', as we have carol-hymns sung cold, with no heaving congregation behind them. But in repertoire terms, the record has some gems, Richard Allain's *Lullay, myn lyking* and Andrew Carter's *Mary's Magnificat* among them. Richard Wilberforce's *My musick shine* is the musical equivalent of a festive movie from Richard Curtis and I live in hope that Alan Partridge might take next to William Mathias's *Sir Christemas*, thus putting it off limits for a decade or two. It's in the simpler pieces that the choir betrays its school status – tone can be thin, tenors obviously adolescent – but there aren't many schools around with choirs that sing as impressively as this.

'It's near impossible for church singers to make a Christmas disc without indulging a curious fetish for close harmony'

Repertoire success in this context is as much about consistency as quality, especially when trying to conjure that bubble of atmosphere that can take a Christmas album to the next level. On which note, much respect to chamber choir Sansara, whose **The Waiting Sky** plots a highly effective and consistent course. It respects the polyphony it chooses (Tallis's *Videte miraculum*, Joquin's *Inviolata, integra et casta es Maria*, Byrd's *Reges Tharsis et insulae*) by not shunting it up against frivolity or someone's repressed idea of 'fun'.

Instead, we get new music that carries some of the aloof purity and mystery of the polyphony that joins it: James MacMillan, John Tavener, Oliver Tarney and Marco Galvani. The latter two composers are associated with the ensemble. Three Tarney carols is sufficient, two might have been more sensible – enough



The chamber choir Sansara create a bubble of Christmas atmosphere with music of purity and mystery

THE VIVALDI EDITION vol.62

CONCERTI PER VIOLINO VII 'PER IL CASTELLO'

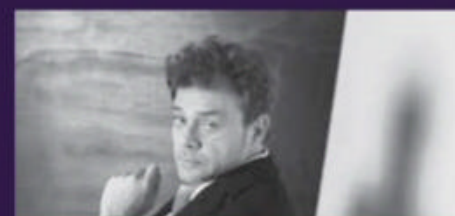


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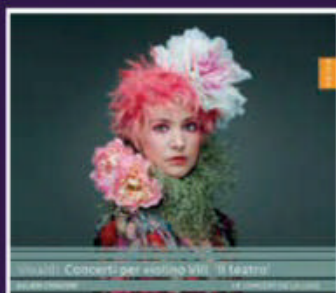
OTHER RELEASES IN THE 2019/2020 SEASON:



CONCERTI PER VIOLONCELLO III

christophe coin CELLO
l'onda armonica

released on october 4th



CONCERTI PER VIOLINO VIII 'IL BALLO'

julien chauvin VIOLIN
le concert de la loge

to be released on february 21st, 2020



ARGIPPO

emöke barath, marianna pizzolato, luigi de donato, delphine galou, marie lys
europa galante I fabio biondi

to be released on june 5th, 2020

to make you admire his fresh, distilled approach but too few to reveal the repeating tricks underneath it. He deserves to get the title-track, though. *The Waiting Sky* has some magic.

Sansara's delivery of the polyphony is notably shapely. It is a 17-voice ensemble that sings with extreme blend but a certain amount of anonymity. The whole project is similarly meticulous but also disengaged from the wonder of the season. There's neither a shiver of cold nor a frisson of atmosphere, as if the whole was recorded in perfect laboratory conditions in June. Which it was. In many ways, it's an excellent record. I'm not convinced it's an excellent Christmas record.

There is no such ambiguity on **A Windy Christmas** (no Brussels sprouts jokes, please) – a colourful potpourri of medleys (if that's not a tautology) for organ and trumpet, organ and oboe, wind quintet, brass ensemble, and all of the above with choir thrown in. The arrangements are by Roderick Elms and the conductor is no less than Bramwell Tovey. From the cover design to the constant seguing between jaunty tunes, you're never in doubt that this is fare for December and December only. I assume much of the music is more fun to play than to listen to (intentionally). The noodling rhapsodies on various carol tunes – including the chief irritants of the genre – can become tiresome. The Joyful Company of Singers sound thin on their various cameo performances but the instrumentalists have panache aplenty and Elms's organ-playing is thrilling.

The chronic lack of focus that has dogged so many seasonal releases has apparently been confined to Christmases past for 2019. This year has brought with it a swing towards the solemnity and expectation of Advent, of which a release from the 'other' King's chapel choir is the finest exponent. **Advent Carols** from The Choir of King's College London uses an old formula that's also a very good one: threading homophonic and polyphonic works in between the traditional Advent antiphons. Director Joseph Fort talks in the booklet of creating a feeling, after the prophet Isaiah, that 'something extraordinary is about to happen'. Mercifully, in this case, that doesn't mean the choir is going to emerge from a cloud of incense on track 19 chirruping barbershop ditties.

This is a version of the choir's own Christmas services in its neo-Baroque Gilbert Scott chapel, which means it's a shame, once again, that we don't have the communal embrace of a congregation singing (yes, it would have been tricky to bus them up to All Hallows' Gospel Oak in the middle of April).

I like this disc because it's programmed with focus right down to its functional title. The record has chosen to be solemn and remains solemn, notwithstanding a needlessly shrieky descant in *O come, O come, Emmanuel*. Philip Moore's *Sancte et sapienter*

THE CHRISTMAS LIST

Your guide to the festive season's recordings



Christmas

The Gesualdo Six / Owain Park

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68299



Christmas at St George's Windsor

Choir of St George's Chapel, Windsor / James Vivian

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68281



Now May We Sing

Choir of Westminster School / Timothy Garrard

Signum Ⓢ SIGCD595



The Waiting Sky

Sansara / Tom Herring & Benjamin Cunningham

Resonus Ⓢ RES10250



A Windy Christmas

Various/Bramwell Tovey

Herald Ⓢ HAVPCD410



Advent Carols

Choir of King's College London / Joseph Fort

Delphian Ⓢ DCD34226



Adventa

Joachim Badenhorst & Mógil

Winter & Winter Ⓢ 910 260-2



The Ballad of the Brown King

Soloists, Desoff Choirs and Orchestra / Malcolm Merriweather

Avie Ⓢ AV2413

is full of that sense of expectation; Joel Rust's *O Radix Jesse* radiates harmonic interest yet feels fundamentally timeless; George Benjamin's *'Twas in the year that King Uzziab died* breaks the mould a little with its terror but is a good enough piece to justify inclusion (and with a strong enough connection: he is King's composition professor); Kerensa Briggs's *Magnificat* is quiet, curvaceous and pregnant. Palestrina, Byrd and Lassus need no justification. The choir can sound muddy in multi-layered polyphony and the soprano group a little tight. Vitaly, though, they establish and maintain an atmosphere, thanks in no small part to those antiphons.

I'd hoped for similar consistency from **Adventa**, a saga in music from Joachim Badenhorst and Belgian-Icelandic post-minimalist, prog-rock, jazz and what-you-will outfit Mógil. Their 13-track journey through the story of farmhand Benedict's Christmas Eve hunt for lost sheep has evocative moments throughout its multifaceted ditties, dances and experimental polyphonic pieces with electronics, although it's incongruous, to my ears, when it apparently throws its hands up and gives us an indie-pop number. But it's always nice, at this time of year, to hear one of those spine-tinglingly breathy Icelandic soprano voices (Heiða Árnadóttir) and to be reminded that even in the season of joy and

goodwill, Icelandic music is fundamentally slow and droney.

'Adventa' suggests there's nothing more serious, at Christmas, than faith – faith in humanity perhaps even more than in deity. That idea is personified in Margaret Bonds, a pianist who gave concertos with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra early in her career but never broke through the various glass ceilings blocking those of a particular gender and race. Either way, she ended up doing something arguably more useful, working as a community musician in New York and latterly LA in a career that spanned four decades from the 1930s. It's humbling to consider the effect her Christmas cantata **The Ballad of the Brown King** (the story of Balthazar, the black king who visited the infant Christ, set to poetry by Bonds's contemporary Langston Hughes) must have had on the black communities who sang its premiere in 1960. The musical language, light but lucid with the occasional glow of *Hänsel und Gretel*-like warmth, hints at gospel and jazz and swells with guarded pride at lines such as 'the king who was tall and brown'. The solo singing is as noble as the choral singing is standoffish, but both are tender. I don't want to patronise the piece by describing it as charming, nor overload it by hailing it a lost masterpiece. More than anything, it served a purpose for its downtrodden community. Hearing it here, for the first time in nearly 60 years, is as good a reminder as any of what this season means. ⑥

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mark Pullinger is swept away by a vividly characterful and richly detailed account of Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* from Les Siècles and François-Xavier Roth



Berlioz

Symphonie fantastique, Op 14.

Les francs-juges - Overture

Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2644 (66' • DDD)

You're attending a grand ball. A beautiful young lady has caught your eye. Dare you? Nervously, you inch towards her to request the next waltz. What if she turns you down? That frisson of nervous excitement is palpable from the agitated string shudders, swelling to *sforzando*, in the introduction to 'Un bal' in Les Siècles's outstanding new recording of the *Symphonie fantastique* – the aural equivalent to butterflies in the stomach. Once the invitation is accepted and you both take to the floor, whirling deliriously, violins sigh with swooning portamentos. Bliss. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, everything. As Leonard Bernstein once warned us, in Berlioz's opium-fuelled *Fantastique*, 'You take a trip, you wind up screaming at your own funeral'. François-Xavier Roth and his period-instrument orchestra have taken the trip from rêveries and passions to witches' sabbath before, a live recording on their own label, performed at the festival in the composer's hometown of La Côte-Saint-André in 2009.

But there is a touch of La Côte-Saint-André on this new Harmonia Mundi disc, which is rounded out with a rousing *Francs-juges* Overture. Among the meticulous orchestral listing in the booklet – everything from Frédéric Triébert oboe to



'Roth seems to have an emotional hotline to Berlioz, alive to every twist and turn of the composer's fevered passions'



François-Xavier Roth's close study of Berlioz's manuscript informs his music-making

Guatrot ophicleide – there's one strictly non-period entry: church bells cast for the 2013 Berlioz festival ... authenticity of another kind.

Much as I enjoyed Les Siècles's earlier recording, this new disc sweeps that, and the rest of the competition, firmly aside. Its sound – recorded in the Maison de l'Orchestre National d'Île-de-France in Alfortville, just outside Paris – is clean and much more closely recorded, revealing much instrumental detail.

The success of this account is not just through the conductor's close study of the autograph manuscript. Roth seems to have an emotional hotline to Berlioz, alive to every twist and turn of the composer's fevered passions. Double basses judder so hard in the first movement (8'54") you can feel the rosin flying. 'Un bal' has

a wonderful tingle factor, cooing clarinet recalling the *idée fixe* motif (4'56") associated with the object of our hero's passion. The only movement where Roth is less expansive, a decade on, is the 'Scène aux champs'. The engineers have perfectly judged the distant oboe (the older recording suffered a lot with extramusical hum at this point) and the woodwinds display bags of character. The string tremolando (6'53") bristles while the clarinet echo at 9'12" is exquisite, followed by a *quasi niente* which acts as a ghostly reminiscence. There are great thundering timpani as the poor cor anglais's cries go unanswered, the oboe having long since abandoned her lover.

Bassoons sit in gruff judgement over Roth's



Fantastic Berlioz: the period-instrument Les Siècles reveal a wealth of instrumental detail and a vibrant array of colours

‘March to the Scaffold’, a purposeful tread with heavy accenting from cellos and basses. If the orchestral guillotine that slices off the clarinet solo at the end is a bit messy, then I suppose that’s the nature of public executions. The ‘Songe d’une nuit du sabbat’ is pungently psychedelic, flutes and oboes playing their eerie octave glissandos with devilish glee, woodwinds cackling and the bassoon and ophicleide ‘Dies irae’ chants chilling the marrow. The tremolando violins and viola at 6’16” are far fiercer than on other recordings, one of a number of occasions I darted to check the score, but Roth is always right.

There have been several period-instrument recordings over the decades, many of them wonderful, although some suffer fatal flaws. The quest for historical authenticity took John Eliot Gardiner and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique (Philips) to the old hall of the Paris Conservatoire, where the work premiered in 1830, a horrible, dead

acoustic. Jos van Immerseel chose to have the bells played as piano chords on his *Anima Eterna* disc, on the flimsy basis that Berlioz once conducted a performance this way in St Petersburg. Marc Minkowski’s *Les Musiciens du Louvre* now sound pallid (DG). Interestingly, only Gardiner and Immerseel include the obligatory cornet à pistons in the Ball.

Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players have long been my HIP benchmark, a peppery reading, but Roth and *Les Siècles* surpass them for colour and characterisation. Indeed, this is not just my favourite ‘historically authentic’ recording. I strongly believe this is the finest account of the *Fantastique* to emerge from France since Charles Munch and the newly formed Orchestre de Paris in 1967 ... and it probably trumps that too. **G**

Symphonie fantastique – selected comparisons:

London Classical Players, Norrington

(4/89⁸) (VIRG/ERAT) ➔ 363286-2 or 628579-2

ORR, Gardiner (6/93) (PHIL) 434 402-2PH

Musiciens du Louvre, Mahler CO, Minkowski

(10/03) (DG) 474 209-2GH

Anima Eterna, Immerseel (5/10) (ZZT) ZZT100101

Siecles, Roth (ACTE) ASM02

KEY TO SYMBOLS

Ⓕ	£10 and over	➔	Download only
Ⓜ	£7.76 to £9.99	Ⓡ	Reissue
Ⓑ	£6.25 to £7.75	Ⓜ	Historic
Ⓢ	£6.24 and below	T	Text(s) included
	(price per disc)	t	translation(s)
②	Compact disc		included
	(number of discs	S	Synopsis included
	in set)	s	subtitles included
Ⓢ	SACD (Super	nla	no longer available
	Audio CD)	aas	all available
DVD	DVD Video		separately
Ⓛ	Blu-ray	oas	only available
Ⓛ	LP		separately



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Peter Quantrill enjoys Paavo Järvi's Messiaen from Zurich's Tonhalle:

'He sustains momentum and tension through some tricky, slow metronome marks and draws a sumptuous sound' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



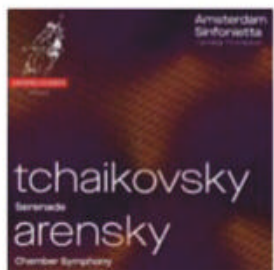
Andrew Farach-Colton hears Wagner from Andrés Orozco-Estrada:

'In the Prelude to Act 1 of Parsifal, the conductor elicits a febrile tone from the strings, so one feels a throb of earthly pain' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**

Arensky • Tchaikovsky

Arensky Chamber Symphony, Op 35 (after String Quartet No 2) **Tchaikovsky** Serenade for Strings, Op 48

Amsterdam Sinfonietta / Candida Thompson
Channel Classics © CCS37119 (57' • DDD)



Robin Holloway remarked that everything in Tchaikovsky's work truest to his genius 'aspires to the condition of ballet': a perception finely conveyed by the Amsterdam Sinfonietta on a recording of the Serenade full of quick and graceful movement, most of all in the heightened tension and suppressed drama of the *Andante*, where only the smallest effort of the imagination brings to mind Siegfried and Odette on her lake of tears. The waltz speaks for itself, with the utmost simplicity and charm, while the more extended structures of the outer movements are borne aloft by unaffected rubato and a light-footed bass section.

The album was announced over four and a half years ago in this magazine but, like Iván Fischer's latest Beethoven instalment for Channel Classics (see page 67), the delay speaks of no hesitation on the part of the musicians. Having worked for over a decade and a half under their leader Candida Thompson, now using markedly less vibrato than on their 2003 recording of the *Souvenir de Florence* (6/04), the Sinfonietta violins are as sweet and silky as one could wish for in the high-lying stretches of the first movement of the Second Quartet by Arensky, without entirely banishing misgivings over the part's suitability for transcription. The dynamic range of both ensemble and discreetly resonant recording in the first movement defies one's best efforts to listen beneath the theme and into the busy textures. Distributing the inner parts between violins, violas and cellos makes musical sense but at a cost to the original's special, cello-heavy colouring, best

appreciated on the Nash Ensemble's recording (Onyx, 8/12).

This movement and the finale have been freshly arranged by Marijn van Prooijen to enclose and complement Arensky's own version of the central elegiac variations on a theme of his teacher Tchaikovsky. Here and in the Serenade some collectors may miss the fuzzy embrace or Russian soul of warmer ensembles such as the Moscow Soloists and the ASMF, but collectors who have enjoyed the Sinfonietta's recent takes on Brahms (9/11, A/18) will enjoy their cleaned-up Tchaikovsky. **Peter Quantrill**

JB Bach • JL Bach • JS Bach

'Ouvertures for Orchestra'

JB Bach Overture in E minor

JL Bach Overture in G

JS Bach Four Orchestral Suites, BWV1066-1069

Concerto Italiano / Rinaldo Alessandrini hpd

Naïve © ② OP30578 (130' • DDD)

JB Bach

Four Orchestral Suites (Ouvertures)

Thüringer Bach Collegium / Gernot Süssmuth vn

Audite © AUDITE97 770 (82' • DDD)



Rinaldo Alessandrini's new recording of Bach's Orchestral Suites may well be the danciest ever. Thirteen years after his joyful account of the *Brandenburg Concertos* (11/05) blasted its way to a *Gramophone* Award, he has turned to these four noble creations and infused them with a choreographic shape and swing that ought to make it hard for listeners to keep still. His long booklet note is full of the evidence of much consideration of the natures of all the different dance types Bach embraced across these 24 movements, but yeah, plenty of people have done that and made claims for the end result before. What makes the difference here is that Alessandrini has not come up with

a blanket, one-style-suits-all tempo or manner for each dance, but treated each one on its own merits. Compare, for instance, the three Menuets: Suite No 1's has a buoyantly motoring one-in-a-bar; No 2's bustles and twitters; and No 4's twirls frilly cuffs at us.

Elsewhere Alessandrini shows that he has no auto-pilot for these pieces, only lively ideas in plenty. Normally racing dances such as the *Réjouissance* and *Badinerie* are calmly measured, as are the *Ouvertures*, though never in the same way twice. The First Suite's *Courante* flaunts a rather deliberate *inégal* while the Forlane stamps like a snorting horse. The Second Suite's *Rondeaux* is surprisingly brisk, while its *Sarabande* refuses to allow itself to fixate on its treble-bass canon, concentrating instead on light and natural phrasing. The Third Suite's famous *Air* is presented not as a melody with subservient accompaniment but as an intricate and lovingly drawn contrapuntal web.

Any performance with as many ideas as this will invite dislikes (I have a bit of a problem with the intermittently clodhopping bass in the First Suite's *Passepied*), but overall I'm sure the lasting impression for many will be of a joyous and refreshing encounter with familiar music, served with a meticulous and constantly imaginative attention to details of phrasing and articulation, a crispness of ensemble and a bright and bracing transparency of texture, that may not have been matched since *Musica Antiqua Köln*'s brilliant but less yielding human *Archiv* recordings in the 1980s.

Alessandrini augments the four Bach Suites on this two-disc set with a suite each by two of his slightly older cousins, Johann Bernhard and Johann Ludwig, both of them more Telemann-like and closer in manner to the form's French origins than their more famous counterparts. They are welcome in themselves, but also have the effect of emphasising just how contrapuntally rich Sebastian's suites are.

Ludwig's Suite is the only one of his to survive, as it happens, but we are luckier



A meeting of minds: Martin Helmchen and Andrew Manze enjoy a special rapport in superb accounts of Beethoven piano concertos – see review on page 66

with Bernhard, for there are four of his left to us, mainly thanks to the interest taken in them by Sebastian, who had three of them copied out to perform alongside his own at the Leipzig Collegium Musicum in the 1730s. All four appear in their own right on a disc from the Thüringer Bach Collegium, a newish group formed to explore just this kind of Bach hinterland and who, led by the violinist Gernot Süssmuth, engage fully with the music's bright mix of movement-types, including some – such as its Caprice, Fantaisie and a couple of French-style character-pieces – not used by Sebastian. Playing one-to-a-part, they find all the nimble energy needed for the likes of the Rigadons and Passepieds, as well as the soulful melody installed in the sweetly rapt Sarabandes and Aires, including one in the G major Suite that is in real 'Air on the G string' territory. The sound is intimate, transparent and not always ideally blended, but it is altogether more present and engaging than in the recording made a little while ago by L'Achéron (Ricercar, 2/17), whose larger forces sound squidgy and distant by comparison. The Thuringians also give us a bonus in 'La Tempête', the little encore – actually a short overture composed in 1691 by Steffani – which Sebastian added to the G major Suite for his Leipzig listeners' entertainment. **Lindsay Kemp**

JS Bach

'Trumpet Concertos'

Concertos – BWV972 (after Vivaldi, RV230); BWV974 (after Marcello); BWV978 (after Vivaldi, RV310); BWV1056; BWV1060. Italian Concerto, BWV971 – 1st movt

Matthias Höfs *tpt*

Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen
Berlin Classics © 0301305BC (52' • DDD)



No modern-day piccolo trumpet soloist offers the security, delicacy and effortless élan of Matthias Höfs in 18th-century repertoire, as witnessed in his quirky Mozart chamber album from 2016 (Es-Dur) and now in this boldly entitled disc of Bach 'trumpet concertos'. As with the great Maurice André's various Bachian excursions, no apologies are given in pursuit of the art of transcription which was second nature to the composer – evinced here in three transcriptions of Venetian composers from Bach's Weimar years and two others which exist only in adaptations he made for keyboard in Leipzig.

Here Höfs resists the temptation of a compendium of movements (apart from the isolated first movement of the *Italian*

Concerto), which allows one to listen with more ambitious ears as to the effectiveness of a complete reworked concerto. The G minor (BWV1056), often played by flautists, is a total delight in this regard, articulated with supreme control and good taste. Both the D major Concerto (BWV972), transcribed by Bach for solo keyboard from Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico*, and the composer's version of Marcello's Oboe Concerto (BWV974), have become staples for trumpet recitalists in recent years. Höfs's personal signature has long been famously impressed on the former with a DVD concert at St Thomas's, Leipzig, recorded with German Brass back in 2009. If less beguilingly played here, the last movement has even more vim and 'tempesta', the quicksilver tonguing propelled by a thrillingly visceral bassoon continuo.

André's best concerto recordings were often illuminated by exceptional chamber orchestras, whether Jörg Faerber in Württemberg or Neville Marriner's Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and the same is true here, with the trumpet sitting *primus inter pares* within the stylish playing of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen. The only difference is where Höfs resorts to the geometric at the expense of the poetic; how

one longs for a broader tempo to carry the glorious curvature of the *Adagio* of the D minor Double Concerto (BWV1060).

The trade-off for designer precision, homogeneity, elegance and evenness of tone is that there's generally less scope for variety of colour, sound and character, or the kind of eye-watering beauty and spontaneity which ensure that André still remains nonpareil. Nevertheless, one cannot but deeply admire Matthias Höfs's dazzling brilliance in these finely chiselled performances. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

Beethoven

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 19;

No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73

Martin Helmchen *pf* **Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin** / **Andrew Manze**

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA555 (66' • DDD)



This is Martin Helmchen and Andrew Manze's first volume in a promised complete survey of Beethoven's concertos. Yes, yet another one. Of course, with Beethoven's anniversary year approaching there will doubtless be a surge of merchandise; but we surely have a right to expect something new(-ish) in the process. Leif Ove Andsnes's 'Journey', for instance, has already taken conducting the concertos from the piano to a new level; with others, historically informed performance and/or chamber arrangements may refresh our ears; still others may take more eye-catching and contemporary measures (Boris Giltburg's ice-bucket, sorry, Beethoven sonatas challenge for 2020 is likely to attract attention to his forthcoming concertos survey).

Helmchen and Manze take none of these routes. Theirs is to all appearances a straight-down-the-middle approach. Yet it does stand high and proud for its artistry, poetry, stylish musicianship and, perhaps above all, rapport between soloist and conductor. This really does feel like a meeting of minds. Listen to the unusually prolonged state of calm before the return of the main theme in the first movement of the *Emperor*, or the subtle recovery of tempo for the subsequent transition. Here and in other magical poetic oases that Helmchen incorporates into the virility and heroism of the first movement, his account is comparable to Emil Gilels with Leopold Ludwig, which for many (myself included) remains unsurpassed.

Nothing is routine here. Helmchen makes no excuse for making the climax

of the second movement stand out and takes greater pains than most to make it distinct from the surrounding serenity. The result is both startlingly effective and natural. If you have principled objections to flexibility and elasticity in the rhythmical design, you might raise an eyebrow. But there is no danger of self-indulgence or mannerism here, and certainly no distortion à la Glenn Gould: just pure individual pianism and freshness of outlook.

Vital energy and connoisseur-level sensitivity to original turns of phrase reign supreme in Helmchen's reading of the Mozart-influenced Second Concerto, and he appropriately exchanges its skittish garments for a serious black frock-coat with the first-movement cadenza, composed much later than the surrounding music, layering the soundscape in something that could have come right out of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata. The lonely piano recitative of the slow movement is a heart-melting moment. Comparison with Helmchen's own recording of this concerto from the final round of the 2001 Clara Haskil competition (which he won) is the best proof of how much a close affinity between pianist and conductor matters. Not only has Helmchen matured in his pianism but he is given wings by an orchestra that shares intimate moments with the piano at one point and twirls with it at the next. The finale is a joyous *pas de deux*, and how charming is Helmchen's invitation to the dance when he adds a subtle agogic accent to the very opening of the movement. This is another account to be placed alongside the finest, including Argerich, and for me surpassing Glenn Gould/Bernstein. If this quality of musicianship is sustained through the next volumes, this will be a journey to rival that of Andsnes and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. **Michelle Assay**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Andsnes, Mahler CO

(6/14^R, A/14^R) (SONY) 88843 05887-2

Concerto No 2 – selected comparisons:

Helmchen, Svizzera Italiana Orch, Foster

(11/02) (CLAV) 50-2113

Argerich, Mahler CO, Abbado (1/05) (DG) 477 5026GH

Gould, Columbia SO, Bernstein (SONY) 88725 41288-2

Concerto No 5 – selected comparison:

Gilels, Philh Orch, Ludwig

(11/57^R) (EMI/WARN) 629511-2

Beethoven

Complete Symphonies

Sara Swietlicki *sop* **Morten Grove Frandsen**

countertenor **Ilker Arcayürek** *ten* **Lars Møller** *bar*

Danish National Concert Choir; Danish Chamber Orchestra / **Adám Fischer**

Naxos Ⓢ Ⓢ 8 505251 (5h 29' • DDD • T/t)



If you're after a rationale behind this extraordinary set of performances, Fischer

himself provides one in the booklet interview accompanying the CDs.

'I need to find out why a piece of music was written', he says, continuing: 'It is not sufficient merely to follow Beethoven's instructions, as this may not suffice to convince the orchestra and the audience. I have to feel it in my body why it was so important to him. And not only that, I have to *want* what he wanted, make his will my own.' And you can take him at his word.

While I'd hesitate to recommend his set with the excellent Danish Chamber Orchestra ('copyrighted' 2016-19) as a first or last stop library-wise, it certainly makes for a pretty daring alternative viewpoint, what with its underlined dynamics (including unorthodox crescendos), unusual pauses for breath, striking tempos (the fleet-footed and brilliantly played finales to Symphonies Nos 1 and 4) and tempo changes, and moments of high drama, such as you'll find at the centre of the *Pastoral*'s first movement and the first movement of the Seventh.

In fact, the Seventh's first movement would prove a pretty revealing sampling track. The opening chords wield the hammer with a vengeance and rhythms are buoyant; but come the little repeated phrase 'tails' at 5'05", Fischer pulls the tempo right back in an attempt to increase a sense of suspense. Then there are the underlined accents at around 10'00" and boldly converging string lines soon after, like a bust-up at what Wagner called 'Apotheosis of the Dance'. A similar sort of thing happens in the coda, whereas the Scherzo goes off like a rocket (the Trio is swift too, though not excessively so) and in the fully fired-up finale those spatially divided violin desks convince you that Beethoven's antiphonal scoring was aimed with a purpose. It's madness not to separate them.

The opening of the Eighth is cleanly tapered, the jabbing accents just before the end of the exposition (and at the beginning of the development) sounding jazzily syncopated. This is an Eighth that glistens and dances, a supplement to the Seventh; you can understand why Beethoven loved it so much. Under Fischer the finale is especially interesting: at 1'12", those quietly teasing little references back to the main theme, he pulls back so as to magnify the sense of play. It works, that's for sure,

but how many times would you want to hear it that way? A similar ploy interrupts the flow at 5'03". Fischer shapes the Second Symphony's opening *Adagio molto* most effectively, and the ensuing *Allegro* is truly *con brio*. Interesting too that the accents in the Scherzo's Trio (initially at 1'45"), are played as written: so often, they're ignored.

The Fifth is high in drama, the first movement dynamic and angrily assertive. Minor hesitations make their mark in the development section – no problem once in a while, but as standard? Not sure. Fischer has a winning way with Beethoven's slow movements and the Fifth's *Andante con moto* is no exception: the exchange between clarinet and bassoon over gently pulsing strings from 4'32" is magical, and so is the little woodwind cadenza soon afterwards. The *Pastoral*'s 'Scene by the Brook' enjoys muted strings, as per Bärenreiter's Urtext edition, and in the 'Pesasant's Merrymaking', the central episode (1'35"), Fischer intensifies the rustic mood by having his lower strings employ racy portamentos, and that really does work.

In the *Eroica* there's a sudden pulling-back at 1'46" into the first movement and at 2'17", just before the close of the (repeated) exposition, those hammered chords which under Fischer gradually gain in loudness and emphasis. The Fourth is even more bizarre: in the first movement's switch from *Adagio* to *Allegro vivace* the approach is so trigger-happy that the two rocketing sets of five-note demisemiquavers on violins (2'17") are completely indistinguishable. On balance, perhaps the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies come off best, but beware the sudden loud timpani thwack at 2'03" into No 7's *Allegretto*. The explosive timps-dominated ruckus at the centre of the Ninth's first movement is impressive and when it comes to the finale, the start of the march features an amusingly flatulent-sounding contrabassoon. Incidentally, the line-up of soloists includes a countertenor in place of a mezzo-soprano, not that the switch is in any way conspicuous.

Now don't get me wrong: I find these performances utterly fascinating, though it would be next to impossible to offer a comprehensive catalogue of the various colourful twists and turns that characterise Fischer's performances (there are far too many of them). If you're schooled in – and wedded to – such old-school 'greats' as Toscanini, Jochum, Klemperer, Wand, Davis, Haitink and others then you'll likely be outraged. No bad thing in my book. Be brave enough to oppose your convictions rather than slavishly follow them. After all, if fearless mavericks of yore such as

Mengelberg, Stokowski, Furtwängler and others could push the interpretative boat out, why not Adám Fischer? The recorded sound is excellent. **Rob Cowan**

Beethoven

Symphonies – No 1, Op 21; No 5, Op 67

Budapest Festival Orchestra / Iván Fischer

Channel Classics ©  CCSSA39719

(62' • DDD/DSD)



Iván Fischer leads a polished and powerful account of Beethoven's Fifth,

although he makes a few odd interpretative choices along the way. The opening *Allegro con brio* is propulsive and grippingly tense. It's also remarkably clear-textured given that the Budapest Festival Orchestra's strings dig in with such gusto; the woodwind parts still shine through. And Fischer illuminates key structural facets such as the seismic harmonic change at the beginning of the development section (around 2'49"), which he registers with a stark shift in orchestral tone colour.

I'm drawn in by the sense of unfolding drama the conductor finds in the *Andante con moto*'s variations, and how he does so without disturbing its essential poise (reminding us that Beethoven did at one point think of marking the movement *Andante quasi menuetto*). And although I'm perplexed by his decision to interpret the third movement's many *poco ritardando* markings as *molto ritardando*, he otherwise gives the music both tautness and swagger, aided by some marvellously potent playing from the horns. In the finale, there's a welcome hint of struggle mixed in with the jubilation (listen to the trumpets' painful, stabbing triplets at 4'55"). I'm not convinced, however, that Fischer's emphatic lengthening of the three opening chords works well – or, at least, not when it's done every time the theme appears (Jansons lengthens these, too, but only on their first appearance). Perhaps it's unfair for me to grumble when Fischer and the BFO bring us so close to this symphony's spiritual essence, but I think it's because their performance is so eloquent and purposeful that such details seem all the more distracting.

Certainly, the contrast here between the Fifth and First Symphonies could hardly be more pronounced. In a booklet note, the conductor writes: 'This album represents the important journey from the classical to the romantic view of a symphony', which may explain why his account of Op 21 is so

relatively well-mannered. The BFO play with elegant vigour in the outer movements but I believe the music needs far greater punch; more often than not, Fischer softens or ignores those twitchy, off-beat *sforzandos* that make Beethoven sound like Beethoven. The Menuetto is strangely sedate – particularly with Nelsons's mad dash still ringing in my ears – and while the *Andante cantabile con moto* is played with beautiful, singing string tone, I find it rather stiffly phrased. Recommended (with the aforementioned caveats) for the Fifth.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:

VPO, Nelsons (11/19) (DG) 483 7071GH6

Symphony No 5 – selected comparison:

Bavarian RSO, Jansons (12/13) (BRKL) 900119

Beethoven

Symphony No 9, 'Choral', Op 125

Anja Kampe *sop* Daniela Sindram *mez* Burkhard

Fritz *ten* René Pape *bass* Vienna Singverein;

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Wiener Symphoniker © WS017 (63' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Goldener Saal, Musikverein, Vienna, May 21 & 22, 2017



This is the final instalment of Philippe Jordan's Beethoven cycle recorded live

with the Vienna Symphony in the spring of 2017; a cycle that followed hard on the heels of the not undistinguished predecessor which Jordan filmed with his own Paris Opéra orchestra in 2014-15 (Arthaus Musik, 12/16 – nla). The Vienna recordings have been well regarded: an exploration that appeared to marry enlivening intelligence with a well-rehearsed understanding of the kind of problems this particular symphonic odyssey inevitably presents.

Orchestras differ, of course, as do acoustics, obliging any conductor to modify and adapt. Rarely, though, has there been so swift and distinct a change as here with Jordan's view of the Ninth. Where his Paris Ninth was measured, grounded and humane, this 2017 Vienna performance tends towards the fast and the faceless. This is especially noticeable in the finale. The newer account has the better choir but the performance, so life-affirming in Paris, emerges (not for the first time in history) with the kind of dead-behind-the-eyes joylessness of a totalitarian hymn.

One can see how Jordan might have looked back at his Paris performance and thought the first movement lacked impetus. Yet this is not a problem that's solved

simply by pressing the accelerator to the floor. In this Vienna performance, the opening *Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso* is taken at an implausibly fast crotchet=82, as opposed to the crotchet=72-76 which wiser counsels (including Jordan himself in 2015) advise if it's dramatic edge you seek.

As Jordan acknowledges, the metronomes are a problem throughout the Ninth. It didn't need Stravinsky to point out the nonsense of the slow movement markings, where *Adagio molto* is marked 60 and *Andante moderato* 63: both, in any case, far too fast. Furtwängler used to take 30/40, Toscanini 36/48, the two pulses nicely proportionate. Jordan is currently 56/60.

Love the movement or loathe it, so rapid a tempo subverts both its purpose and its mood. As the poet writes, 'What is life if, full of care / We have no time to stand and stare?'. In Paris Jordan gave us that time; in Vienna he doesn't. **Richard Osborne**

Bruckner

Symphony No 2 (1877 version, ed Carragan)

Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

Video director **Alexander Radulescu**

Unitel/C Major Entertainment (F) DVD 730508;

(F) Blu-ray 730604 (63' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg, February 6, 2019



With this final instalment of Thielemann's Bruckner series with the Staatskapelle Dresden, a complete cycle of the

composer's numbered symphonies is available on DVD and Blu-ray for the first time, previous video sets from Wand and Barenboim having included only Symphonies Nos 4-9.

Thielemann opts for the revised 1877 version of the symphony rather than the longer version from 1872. Like Barenboim in his two recordings of the 1877 edition, Thielemann observes the cut from bars 48 to 69 in the second theme of the *Andante*. This is in keeping with the composer's final wishes, although the Carragan edition includes the passage as an option for the conductor, and both Janowski and Venzago include it in their recordings.

Common with previous releases in the cycle is the warm and alert playing from the Staatskapelle Dresden. There is a real sense of the players listening and responding to each other during the performance. As before, Thielemann

conducts from memory throughout, directing the orchestra with his usual serious expression and occasionally inflexible baton technique. It's not the most involving performance, however, until the last movement, which commences with a blaze of energy significantly beyond anything heard earlier in the symphony. Unfortunately, this new level of intensity is relatively short-lived, the tension seeming to ebb away in the movement's more reflective passages. It's a similar story in the *Andante*, the refinement of the playing undermined by a tendency towards lethargy as well as some notably exaggerated dynamics, both loud and quiet.

The video direction by Alexander Radulescu maintains a judicious balance between conductor and orchestra, with well-timed close-ups of individual players. There are also occasional distance shots showing the orchestra in the wider setting of the Elbphilharmonie. The Blu-ray disc I watched maintains the exemplary video and audio quality of the cycle as a whole.

Christian Hoskins

Bruckner

Symphony No 9 (original version, ed Nowak)

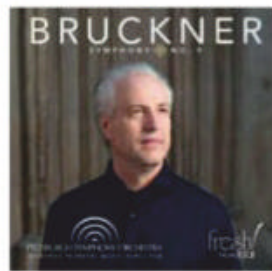
Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra /

Manfred Honeck

Reference Recordings (F) FR733

(63' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, Pittsburgh, February 23-25, 2018



Manfred Honeck's interpretation of the three-movement version of Bruckner's

Ninth Symphony is one of the most distinctive to have appeared for some years. 'It is in the Ninth that Bruckner invites us into the presence of God', Honeck writes in the booklet note, and goes on to explain his thoughts about the symphony in an essay extending nearly 18 pages. The beginning of the first movement, he tells us, 'can be seen as a death march without accompaniment', while the *Adagio*, he suggests, is modelled on the *Agnus Dei* from the traditional Latin Mass. The essay (in English only) includes over 50 references to bar numbers and associated timings in the recording where Honeck wishes to explain some point of detail or other. Altogether, it's one of the most detailed booklet notes I've ever seen. As such, it's a pity that no one picked up the erroneous year given for Bruckner's birth.

Honeck's management of tempo relations is for the most part judicious

and subtle. Not for him the feverish accelerandos in climactic passages favoured by the likes of Jochum and Venzago. By contrast, his approach to balance and dynamics is highly individual. The orchestral sound is dark-hued and saturated, aided by a recording that favours the low bass. Double bass pizzicatos are pronounced and resonant, and timpani rolls sound positively volcanic. The trumpets from bar 7 in the first movement have a martial quality, and on a number of occasions Honeck adds an additional crescendo towards the end of extended *fff* passages. Some of these performance interventions are explained in the booklet note, but others are not. For example, why do the violins at the start of the *Adagio* slowly swell from *piano* when the score indicates *forte*? Perhaps Honeck felt the opening should emulate that of Wagner's *Parsifal*, but I found this and some of the other interpretative idiosyncrasies more distracting than inspired.

Considered as a whole, this new version is a compelling account of the symphony with considerable depth of feeling and intimations of the beyond. The closing pages of the symphony are especially sublime. It might not reach the lofty heights achieved by Giulini or Barenboim but it's a definitely a recording to hear.

Christian Hoskins

Selected comparisons:

VPO, Giulini, (8/89) (DG) 427 345-2GH

BPO, Barenboim (10/91^R) (WARN) 2564 61891-2

Dvořák • Martinů

Dvořák Piano Concerto, Op 33 B63 Martinů

Piano Concerto No 4, 'Incantation', H358

Ivo Kahánek *pf*

Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Jakub Hrůša

Supraphon (F) SU4236-2 (60' • DDD)



Among Bohuslav Martinů's five piano concertos, his Fourth (1956) is arguably the

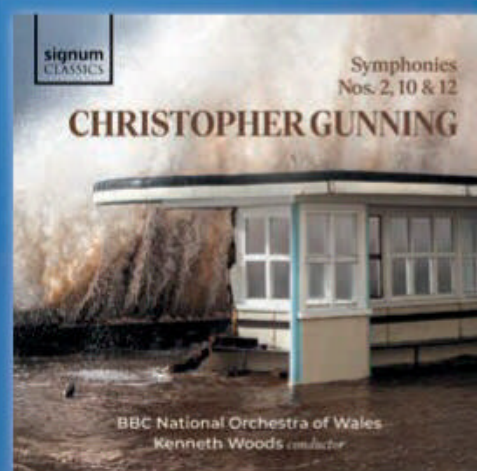
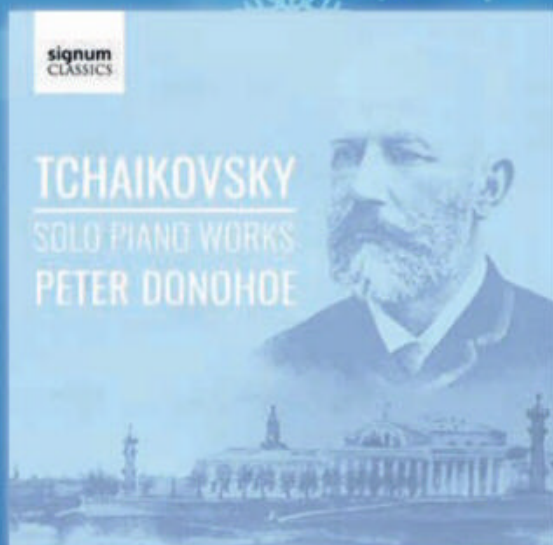
most original and inventive, and certainly the most difficult from the standpoint of coordinating and balancing ensemble and soloist. The orchestral writing alternates between sections of massive, complex scoring and the most delicately exposed concertante passages. The pianist, moreover, has to navigate buckets of notes and avoid being submerged by the thick textures. Ivo Kahánek does this and more. He brings assertive drive to the first movement's chordal outbursts and vertiginous coda, the latter boasting more urgency and heft than in Robert Kolinsky's

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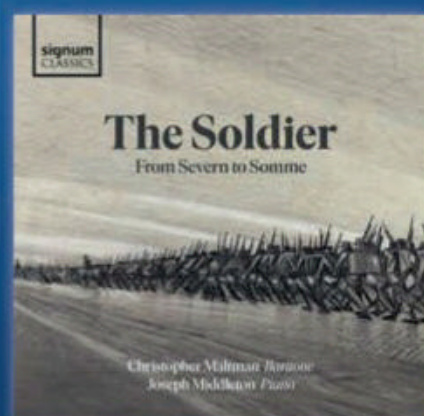
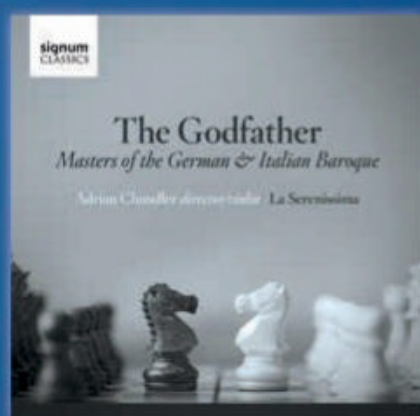
After a hugely successful career writing for the screen including scores for Agatha Christie's 'Poirot', La Vie en Rose, and Middlemarch, Chris Gunning is now focussed on his classical work.

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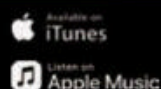
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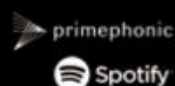
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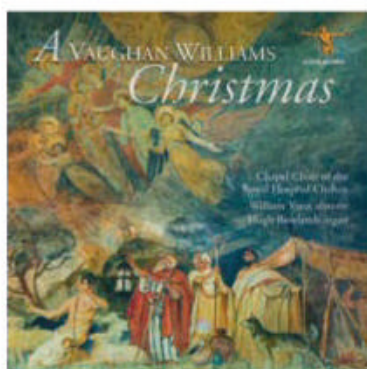
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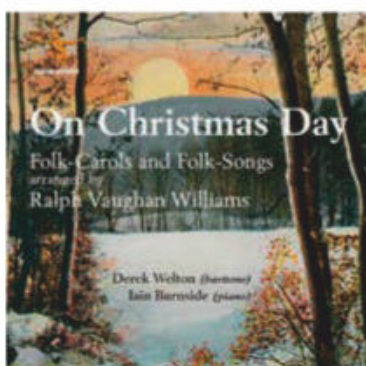


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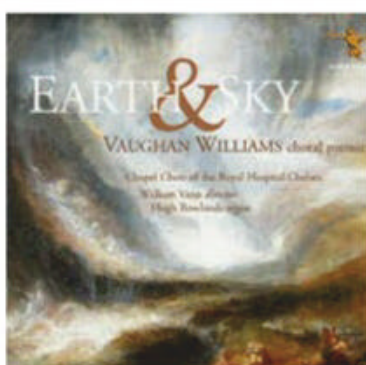


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relatively lighter traversal under Vladimir Ashkenazy (Ondine, 1/10). Kahánek's full-bodied unfolding of the motoric solo about a minute and a half into the second movement gives a kind of Bachian weight to the left-hand pedal notes that contrast with, say, Rudolf Firkušný's fluent lyricism (RCA, 4/95). Although Jakub Hruša elicits a wide range of colours from his Bamberg musicians, Libor Pešek and the Czech Philharmonic handle the trickier rhythmic challenges more decisively; you only need compare the rapid interplay in the first movement's opening pages to hear the difference, especially in the percussion.

The orchestral image is more blended and diffuse in the Dvořák Concerto, recorded two years earlier than the Martinů. As a consequence, the woodwinds lack the presence and vivacity that abound in the Aimard/Harnoncourt recording (Teldec, 1/04), although one must credit the robust yet well-defined strings. Kahánek makes Dvořák's occasionally unwieldy keyboard-writing sound effortlessly idiomatic (the pianist uses the original text), and also points up the *Allegro agitato*'s debt to the first movement of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto. He allows himself a discreet amount of wiggle-room in the finale's wonderful 'Stranger in Paradise' second subject, and brings more than a few inner voices to the fore. Yet I miss the perkier accents, the overall spontaneity and clearer sound that still distinguish Vassily Primakov's recording with Justin Brown and the Odense Symphony Orchestra (Bridge, 2/10) as my version of reference. Supraphon's booklet contains an extensive and thoughtful interview with the pianist and the conductor, with English, French and German translations accompanying the original Czech text. **Jed Distler**

Glass

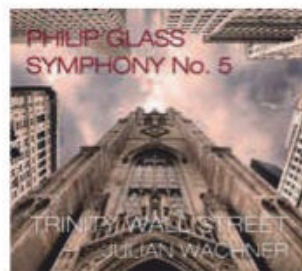
Symphony No 5

Heather Buck *sop* **Katherine Pracht** *mez* **Vale Rideout** *ten* **Stephen Salters** *bar* **David Cushing** *bass* **The Choir of Trinity Wall Street; Downtown Voices; Trinity Youth Chorus; Novus NY / Julian Wachner**

Orange Mountain ® (2 + DVD) OMM0143 (94' • DDD)

Recorded live, May 17-20, 2017

Texts available from philipglass.com



Premiered at the Salzburg Festival in August 1999 as a latter-day 'Ode to Joy' to mark the close of the last

millennium, there can hardly be many modern symphonies that quite match Philip Glass's Fifth in terms of ambition, scale, depth and scope.

This is a definitely a symphony with brass knobs on. Comprising choir, children's voices, five soloists and full orchestra, this 90-minute work consists of 12 movements that subdivide equally into three four-movement sections.

Still, the Fifth's most striking feature is its all-encompassing thematic and narrative sweep. An explosive opening movement subtitled 'Before the Creation' sets the scene for a dramatic first part which draws on Creation myths depicting the birth of the universe, planet Earth, the evolution of various life-forms and the coming into being of humans. Part 2 is more expressive in nature, exploring conflicting emotions such as love, compassion, ignorance and evilness. Part 3 brings together these elements in a wheel-of-life cycle that loops through life to death and beyond, with the final movement returning full-circle to the birth of existence heard at the beginning.

These themes are given particular resonance through a textual tapestry compiled by Glass in consultation with the Very Reverend James Parks Morton and Professor Kusumita Pedersen, which ranges from the Old Testament and Koran to the Rig Veda, Vishnu Purāna and Bhagavad Gita. These texts reflect Glass's own particular multi-faith outlook, developed over the years through studies of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and other religious and spiritual traditions.

The symphony thus seeks to identify commonalities between faiths rather than divisions and differences, and this is achieved largely through Glass's unfussy setting. Speech-like melodic lines and transparent orchestral accompaniments serve to foreground the significance of these texts without massaging too much meaning into them. That said, the music springs terrifyingly into life at key moments, such as the 'Fire Sermon' section in the sixth movement – with choir and orchestra at full throttle – or poignantly at other times, such as in the 11th movement, where soprano Heather Buck's ethereal floating lines plead for peace and reconciliation by quoting from the 13th-century Persian poet Rumi ('It is the time of union').

Buck is brilliant throughout, but all five soloists give a very good account of themselves. In particular, baritone Stephen Salters and bass David Cushing stand out, with Cushing's resonant voice at the end of the second and beginning of the third sections providing operatic depth and colour.

Julian Wachner's no-frills direction with Trinity Wall Street's new-music orchestra, Novus NY, allows the texts to retain their presence and immediacy. The entire performance is captured vividly on an accompanying DVD of the performance from Trinity Church, Wall Street, Manhattan, which took place on May 20, 2017. Master craftsman or phoney symphonist? The jury may still be out on Philip Glass's achievements in this most revered of classical forms, yet there can be little doubt that his music imbues the tonality of our time with strikingly powerful elemental quality. If nothing else, the Fifth Symphony bears impressive testimony to that. **Pwyll ap Siôn**

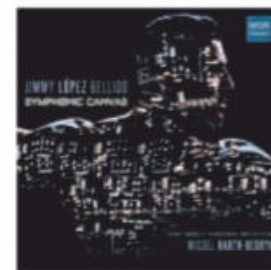
López Bellido

Symphony No 1, 'The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda'. Bel canto: A Symphonic Canvas

Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra /

Miguel Harth-Bedoya

MSR Classics © MS1737 (76' • DDD)



In his detailed booklet note, Jimmy López Bellido writes that the First Symphony

(2016) was commissioned as part of the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of Cervantes's death, and inspired by the author's final work, *The Travails of Persiles and Sigismunda*. But, he adds, his symphony is not in any way programmatic; rather, it's 'a personal expression by a composer who laughs, enjoys and grieves with Cervantes'.

I can't say I hear anything even remotely humorous in López Bellido's four-movement score. In fact, it has a pervasively dark and ominous tone. The Peruvian-born composer knows how to slowly ratchet up tension, and the outer movements flow in huge waves that rise, crash and immediately regenerate, so one has the feeling that something perilous might be just over the next crest. The second movement is somewhat brighter, and in its moments of rhapsodic lyricism the romance in Cervantes's tale comes to the fore, but it's still starlit rather than sunlit. Even the third movement's Latin-flavoured dance suggests danger, with its convulsive rhythms and cannon-like volleys of percussion.

At 45 minutes, López Bellido's First Symphony is quite substantial, and it's impressive how he creates a sense of expansiveness through extreme motivic concision so the whole hangs together with surprising tautness. Indeed, the entire work is built from a churning four-note figure

which in itself is a condensation of the wave shape that dominates much of the symphony's structure. It's also imaginatively orchestrated – though less colourfully than the half-hour 'symphonic canvas' he's created from his 2015 opera *Bel canto*.

I haven't seen the opera, based on Ann Patchett's novel about an opera singer visiting an unspecified Latin American country who's taken hostage along with an assortment of others in a terrorist action, but this eventful three-part orchestral suite provides ample evidence of López Bellido's dramatic sensibility. The long central movement feels a bit sewn together yet it's also consistently engaging, and at times so lavishly scored it wouldn't seem out of place as the soundtrack to a Hollywood blockbuster.

López Bellido's music may not be strikingly original but he does have a distinctive voice, and his suite from *Bel canto* is melodically memorable and quite moving at times. The heroine's final aria (here given to the trumpet) is a lyrical *coup de théâtre*, and has me eager to hear the opera in its entirety. Miguel Harth-Bedoya elicits polished, committed playing from the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in both works, and the recorded sound is superb. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Mahler

Symphony No 8

Manuela Uhl, Polina Pastirchak, Fatma Said *sops*

Katrin Wundsam *mez* **Katharina Magiera** *contr*

Neal Cooper *ten* **Hanno Müller-Brachmann** *bar*

Peter Rose *bass* **Choir of the Düsseldorf**

Musikverein; Bonn Philharmonic Choir;

Kartäuserkantorei Köln; Clara Schumann

Youth Choir, Düsseldorf; Düsseldorf

Symphony Orchestra / Adám Fischer

AVI-Music © AVI8553474 (77' • DDD)



Rather as he did for his controversial (and somewhat disappointing)

account of *Das Lied von der Erde*, Adám Fischer offers a kind of apologia in the booklet note as to the particular challenges of the Eighth Symphony and how one seeks to address them in performance and recording. I rather like his reference to the work's 'crowd scenes' and I certainly appreciate his analysis with regard to how one might balance scale against precision and clarity. But the end result is disappointing, not just on account of its failure to blow one's socks off sonically but because, for various reasons, it fails

to engage emotionally. Overwhelming it is not.

It doesn't begin well. There is precious little heft, thrust, uplift in the opening proclamation 'Veni Creator Spiritus'. The tone is not exultant, the rhythm sluggish. This mighty motet needs to feel imperative from the very start, and if that sense of a driving march is not immediately established then it's harder making sense of what follows. Things do look up in the development beginning with the mighty exhortation 'Accende ... lumen sensibus', rampaging trombones making their mark in pushing forward Fischer's urgent tempo. But the boys' chorus aren't punchy enough and there isn't that recurrent thrill along the way of the two sopranos whacking out notes above the stave. Indeed, they are virtually inaudible in one or two of those key moments. I realise that Mahler wanted his soloists to be more a part of the choral texture in Part 1 but they really are too well integrated and their sound too thin and colourless – even as they plead for divine grace shortly after the start.

Fischer applies some big Mahlerian rubatos in this section, opening out with rhetorical deliberation and effecting a mighty (unwritten) expansion into the recapitulation. But still one doesn't experience that heart-stopping emotional pull. Even the wave-upon-wave effect of the coda – a 'crowd scene' and then some – feels manufactured rather than irresistible.

Interesting that Fischer favours a suspended cymbal as opposed to shimmering 'swishes' in the prelude to Part 2. Again it is not leavened with the same intensity that a Tennstedt or Bernstein or even Solti manage. But it at least has its own atmosphere. The drama of Goethe's *Faust* (the closest Mahler ever came to writing an opera) suddenly makes individuals of the solo voices and two of those voices – Hanno Müller-Brachmann (baritone) and Neal Cooper (tenor) – are seriously wanting, the former sorely stretched, even hoarse, in his solemn aria, the jagged string figurations leaping up around the voice and almost swallowing it whole. The tenor part's high tessitura is notorious but Neal Cooper woefully lacks the essential Heldentenor girth and comes across (again the recording balance does not help him) as nasal and constricted at the top.

For the rest, Mahler's heavenly high jinks unfold playfully and jubilantly enough, though there is not that sense of wonder when the Mater Gloriosa floats into view and we are invited to 'gaze aloft'. That extraordinary orchestral passage (piccolos, flute, clarinet, harmonium,

piano, harps, string quartet) ushering in the Chorus Mysticus is still heart-stopping but the entry of the chorus is hardly as Mahler requested 'like a breath'.

Regular readers will know how much I have loved other instalments in this cycle – and perhaps I will again. But it's interesting that the arrival of vocal elements seems to have stalled the magic for Fischer. And, rather crucially, there are no texts in the booklet (the same was true of the *Das Lied*) – a serious omission – and who else feels that the lack of 'ident' tracks (just two for the whole piece) is not exactly user-friendly? **Edward Seckerson**

Messiaen

L'Ascension^a. Les offrandes oubliées^a.

Un sourire. Le tombeau resplendissant^a

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / Paavo Järvi

Alpha © ALPHA548 (65' • DDD)

^aRecorded live, January & April 2019



The received wisdom is that Messiaen grew up at the keyboard, so to

speak, but according to his teacher Marcel Dupré he never so much as set eyes on an organ console until the age of 18. Having won a first prize in composition at the Paris Conservatoire in 1930, he completed four major orchestral scores in four years. Paavo Järvi and Alpha have missed a trick by leaving out the third of them, the *Hymne au Saint-Sacrament* (1932), and replacing it with the composer's late tribute to Mozart, *Un sourire* (1989), in a scrupulous studio account that in no way supersedes previous recordings directed by Jun Märkl (Naxos, 9/12) and Myung-Whun Chung (DG, 8/95).

Rather, it is the live performances of the prentice works that merit further attention. This is the first recording to do full justice to *Le tombeau resplendissant*, more accurately played than Chung, more imaginatively voiced than Märkl. The piece emerges not as an inferior sequel to *Les offrandes oubliées* but as a powerful and deeply personal symphonic poem in its own right, precociously establishing Messiaen's orchestral voice for all the evident debts to Franck in form, Scriabin in harmony and Berlioz in orchestration – hardly negligible models to follow. It becomes understandable why the deeply private and secretive composer should have discouraged performances, having bared his soul and given vent to his anger over the death of his mother in both the work's first and third sections and a written

preface, helpfully printed in the booklet: 'My youth is dead: it was I who killed it. Rage, where are you leading me?' There's nothing quite like it in the rest of Messiaen's output.

Dukas taught him composition, and the influence of *L'apprenti sorcier* is writ large over the screeching violins and irresistible accelerando in the central panel of *Les offrandes oubliées*, where a similar expression of grief is subsumed in a crucifixion scene. Here and in the closing, serene depiction of celestial rapture there is a silky assurance that bodes promisingly for the relationship between the Zurich orchestra and their new director, as well as the new recording studio built in the basement of the Tonhalle.

L'Ascension is more subject to the vagaries of live recording – some questionable brass intonation in the opening movement, tangled textures in the Debussian tracery of the 'Alléluias sereins' – but again Järvi has the full measure of the piece. He sustains momentum and tension through some tricky, slow metronome marks and draws a sumptuously appointed weight of sound from the Tonhalle strings in the ecstatic 'Prière du Christ montant a son Père' while steering clear of both Stokowski's showmanship and Chung's ponderous solemnity. 'One of my favourite works', says Järvi in an enlightening booklet interview, and you can tell.

Peter Quantrill

Prokofiev

Symphony-Concerto, Op 125^a.

Cello Sonata, Op 119^b

Bruno Philippe ^{vc} **Tanguy de Williencourt** *pf*

^aFrankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Christoph Eschenbach

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2608 (66' • DDD)



These exceptionally beautiful reappraisals are likely to divide listeners. Bruno

Philippe's command of the instrument can scarcely be gainsaid – his tone is simply glorious – but prizing lyricism and restraint over drama in late Prokofiev is not without risks.

In the *Symphony-Concerto* (or *Sinfonia concertante* – the trilingual booklet is in two minds) Philippe's perky opening proves deceptive: we are soon led into a world of half-light and reverie in which the close miking of the cellist makes for some audible bow sounds and sharp intakes of breath. Conversely, Christoph Eschenbach and his Frankfurt players seem (or are

made to seem) reluctant to intrude beyond a few significant solos. The atmosphere is intimate, remote from the heroics of the Rostropovich tradition or the darker mellifluousness of Gautier Capuçon's collaboration with Valery Gergiev.

In the complex central movement, where Han-Na Chang turns waspish, at times almost hectoring as seconded by Antonio Pappano's faux-Soviet LSO, the Harmonia Mundi team beguiles us with a fairy-tale lightness of texture. Even the finale's suitably fleet closing bars lose their oppressive aura with brass interjections and timpani thwacks mixed down. Not the whole story, perhaps; then again many modern exponents promote a loose-limbed, rhapsodic approach and Philippe's acute sensitivity offers its own rewards. Still in his twenties, his longstanding affection for the composer is never in doubt.

There's Mendelssohnian delicacy and poise in the coupling too, regular collaborator Tanguy de Williencourt offering tactful rather than clangorous support. As before, some will feel the invention requires a coarser response. The quotation from Maxim Gorky inscribed on the first page of the manuscript is, after all, 'Man! That has a proud sound.' Whatever you make of that, the present pairing is wonderfully subtle and distinctive. The music never stops singing. **David Gutman**

Symphony-Concerto – selected comparisons:

Chang, LSO, Pappano (5/03) (EMI/WARN) ➔ 557438-2

G Capuçon, Mariinsky Orch, Gergiev

(4/10) (VIRG/ERAT) 694486-0

Schumann

Symphonies – No 2, Op 61^a; D minor (original version of No 4)^b. Genoveva – Overture

London Symphony Orchestra /

Sir John Eliot Gardiner

LSO Live © LSO0818 (69' • DDD/DSD)

^{ab}Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

March ^a11 & ^b15, 2018

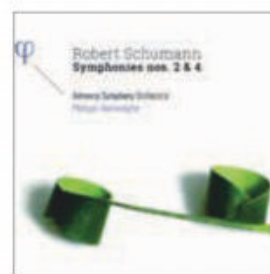
Schumann

Symphonies – No 2, Op 61; No 4, Op 120

Antwerp Symphony Orchestra /

Philippe Herreweghe

PHI © LPH032 (65' • DDD)



Two veteran conductors from the period-instrument movement revisit Schumann's symphonies with modern-instrument orchestras. Coincidentally, in reviewing Philippe Herreweghe's earlier traversals

with the Champs-Élysées Orchestra (the *Spring* and *Rhenish* Symphonies, 6/07), it was to John Eliot Gardiner's benchmark cycle with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique that direct comparison was made; indeed, as recently as the September issue, comparing recordings of the Second, Richard Whitehouse wrote: 'If, ultimately, [Gardiner's] pulsating virtuosity feels too much its own justification, Philippe Herreweghe's more understated while more probing approach should not be found wanting, abetted by playing of real finesse, with an emphasis on detail that is never intrusive: Schumann the ruminative poet rather than histrionic dramatist.'

One would expect the LSO, in the upfront but unsubtle acoustic of the Barbican, to sound more extrovert – even brash – than the softer-grained Antwerp SO in the plusher Queen Elisabeth Hall. And again Herreweghe seeks the poetry where Gardiner drives through for maximum dramatic effect. Oddly, Herreweghe's string section sounds the smaller, although the two are of similar dimensions. The pay-off for Herreweghe is that this promotes the woodwind in the balance – not that the LSO's virtuoso winds are backwards in coming forwards. In places such as the two slow introductions, Herreweghe hews closer to the beat, Gardiner to the contour of the undulating phrase. Shaving only 10 seconds off Herreweghe's timing, Gardiner distils more Mendelssohnian fairy-lightness in the Second's Scherzo. He also knows how to set the music free: when the clarinet brings back the arching theme of the slow movement in inversion in the Second's finale (four after fig R, 2'40"), Gardiner's performance takes wing, while Herreweghe's remains frustratingly earthbound.

Herreweghe remains faithful to the familiar revised 1851 version of the Fourth, while Gardiner opts for the tauter, more compact original 1841 version. (His ORR cycle contains both, and he writes that he considers the alterations to the later version a 'net loss' over the original.) Gardiner also offers a suitably *agitato* performance of the *Genoveva* Overture.

The verdict remains the same, however: Herreweghe contemplating these masterpieces serenely from within, Gardiner going all out for visceral sensation. The London performances bring the music most readily to life: storytelling as opposed to the Belgians' reportage. Good though it is to be updated on both conductors' approaches to this music, neither disc fully replaces its predecessor(s), and perhaps only the (presumed)

continuation of the respective cycles will resolve the matter one way or the other. Nevertheless, Gardiner's ORR traversal of all the symphonic works remains a firm recommendation, along with Dausgaard, whose more recent Swedish series remains a strong modern-instrument alternative.

David Threasher

Symphonies – selected comparisons:

Champs-Élysées Orch, Herreweghe

(9/97^R, 6/07^R) (HARM) HMG50 8190/91

ORR, Gardiner (6/98) (ARCH) 457 591-2AH3

Swedish CO, Dausgaard

(5/07, 1/09) (BIS) BIS-SACD1519/1619 (oas)

Shostakovich

Symphony No 4, Op 43

London Symphony Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live (M) LSO0832 (65' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

November 1 & 4, 2018



It's the symphony that might or might not have recalibrated Shostakovich's future

and it's still one of the trickiest to pull off in performance. Noseda meets it halfway – which makes for pluses and minuses. His LSO Live performance doesn't get off to a particularly arresting start. This cynical off-kilter march – which I always think of as a malevolent distant relative of the Mahler Third opening – arrives with malice aforethought but with punches pulled. It seems to me slightly apologetic of its ugly demeanour.

The trick with this piece is surely to honour its skewed, even obtuse way with form and development (both of which are deceptively present) and still convey its renegade spirit – a sense of the seemingly random and irrational. The way it zips off on unpredictable and unexpected tangents is integral to its originality. It resolutely refuses to offer the listener 'signposts' designed to point the way through its thinly disguised sonata form. To his credit Noseda seeks to convey forward movement in a piece that sometimes feels like it's facing the wrong way, but in doing so I do wonder if he slightly undermines Shostakovich's attempts to wrong-foot us.

There are exceptions. Sometimes the shock-tactics really come off the page. So startling and extreme is the tempo for the inexplicable string fugue of the first-movement development that it catches even the LSO off guard. They aren't quite ready for it. Reckless in intention and effect.

I wonder if the short (almost *attacca*) pauses between movements was Noseda's idea? I think we need a moment or two of reflection after the shadowy coda of the first movement before we enter the equally shadowy world of the ghostly Scherzo. But I see his point. The brittle clickety-click of percussion (not quite as cleanly delineated as it might be) just before the close became an unsettling leitmotif for Shostakovich throughout his career (used in the Second Cello Concerto and Fifteenth Symphony) and demonstrates the importance of this symphony for the composer. The clock was ticking.

For the rest, the circus-like diversions in the finale hit the right note of sarcasm in the work of the LSO's principal trombone and I love the way the subverted triumph of the final climax emerges so ferociously in tattooing timpani from all this false jollification. If ever there was a depiction in sound of grotesque self-aggrandisement, this is it. Small wonder Stalin was no fan.

Edward Seckerson

Shostakovich

Symphony No 7, 'Leningrad', Op 60

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik (E) 900184 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie im Gasteig,

Munich, February 9-12, 2016



One of these days a Mariss Jansons recording will arrive that will confound

my expectations. This, alas, is not it. You can tell at once from the cultured, well-rounded Bavarian sound that the very notion of something edgy or unvarnished will not be countenanced. Even as the side drum signals the seemingly innocuous toe-tapping, Stalin-friendly tune a warmth and cosiness pervades.

Contrary to the unsettling nature of what follows, each variation in scoring designed, in effect, to recalibrate the wretched tune is subtly and slickly inflected so that far from suggesting a sinister series of mutations what we get here is a kind of catwalk presentation of each. No menace, no threat as the tune grows in confidence and ballast (I kept waiting for the excitement to kick in) and no ratcheting-up of shock and awe as that terrifying change of key piles in the extra brass and a massive accumulation of decibels. This juggernaut is shiny and immaculate.

It's the characterisation (or the lack of) that seems to me consistently wrong-

headed. The fabulous first bassoon delivers a solo in the dying moments of the first movement so opulent in tone that it suggests contentment in music that is so plainly lachrymose. Beauty and blend conspire to take the edge off some of Shostakovich's most original writing in the inner movements. Even the spooky Scherzo fails to unsettle as the bass clarinet (over flutter-tonguing flutes) worms for the closing pages.

There is no chill about the stark Stravinskian wind chorale at the outset of the extraordinary third movement. I'm not denying the strange, other-worldly quality of the playing here, the way the strings take up the limpid flute theme in such a cool luxuriant way – but what does the performance of this great movement (unique in the composer's symphonic canon) say about the heartache and desolation therein? Is the all-pervasive mellowness of the reading, both in colour and cast, in keeping?

I will rest my case with the long road to salvation – that is, the inexorable build to the triumphant, or should I say defiant, coda. When the trombones finally weigh in with the hopeful opening theme of the symphony Shostakovich marks a huge *ritardando* at the point where the trumpets well and truly carry it into the affirmative – but Jansons makes nothing of the moment and proceeds to push the music forwards, effectively halving the tempo in the ensuing pages as if to apologise for the bombast. And he also does that classic thing of accelerating through the timpani and bass drum-led final bars as if to whip up excitement for the big finish. The short silence before the first 'bravo' (this is a live performance) seems to suggest it backfires.

Not for me. It may be handsome but it just isn't Shostakovich. **Edward Seckerson**

Terterian

Komitas Shoger jan (Dear Shoger)

Terterian Symphonies – No 3; No 4

Traditional Noobar-Noobar

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra /

Kirill Karabits

Chandos (E) CHSA5241 (59' • DDD/DSD)



Avet Rubeni Terterian's relatively early death in 1994 may not be the only

reason we haven't heard more of him. A composer from the geographical and stylistic margins of the old Soviet empire, his music is tougher than that of peers such as Sofia Gubaidulina or the recently

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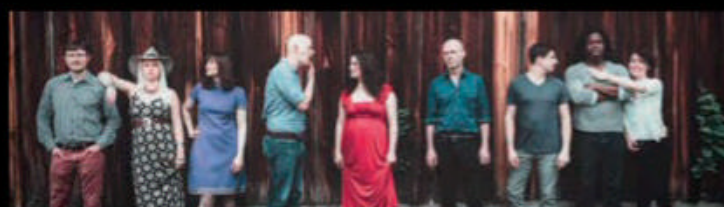
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deceased Giya Kancheli, a friend. Like Kancheli, Terterian relied a good deal on short-breathed rhetorical gestures and the shock value of extreme louds and softs, but his own 'spiritual' idiom comes without the aura of consolation. Chandos must be hoping its 'barbaric' folk-derived component will provide another way in. Melodic interlopers are placed between the main utterances on the present disc, performed by Tigran Aleksanyan and Vahe Hovanesian on a pair of unaccompanied duduks, cylindrical double-reed instruments with a shawm-like timbre.

A rendition of Terterian's Seventh Symphony given at London's Royal Festival Hall shortly before his death would seem to have been the first local airing for any of his music. Kirill Karabits's live account of the Third at Poole's Lighthouse (presumably its UK public premiere) followed as recently as March 2019. It's a score he has championed elsewhere in Europe and about which he obviously feels deeply, adopting generally slower tempos and sharper dynamic contrasts than Loris Tjeknavorian and the Armenian Philharmonic (ASV, A/97).

Scored for a large but selectively deployed orchestra including extra horns, duduks and zurnas, this 1975 work feels like a creative response to the Armenian genocide for all that the booklet cites more personal memories. The first movement, led off by directionless timpani thwacks, is stark and unsparing. The second, by contrast, is barely audible, all post-apocalyptic lamentation. In the finale, a Lalo Schifrin-style riff is strafed by howling alarms before we arrive at the affecting reprise of earlier ideas, one final catastrophic gesture and a quiet fade. Whether or not such sparse, essentially static invention adds up to a masterpiece, it sounds very much at home on Chandos's generous sound stage. Older hands may find the Bournemouth orchestra too polite.

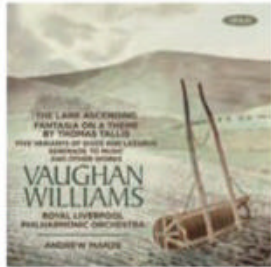
Dating from 1976, the one-movement Fourth Symphony is more obviously 'sonoristic' and differently emotive, its preponderance of distinctly East European sound clouds framed by tintinnabular pinging. There's a recurring role for nostalgic, Schnittke-ish harpsichord as well as sporadic resort to percussion-led protest. The score exists in two forms: Karabits opts for the original version, notated without bar lines. This most challenging of Chandos's 'Voices from the East' is much more than a sonic spectacular, though it's that too. There are annotations by Andrew Burn and reminiscences from the conductor himself. **David Gutman**

Vaughan Williams

English Folk Song Suite (orch Jacob).
Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis.
Fantasia on Greensleeves. Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'. The Lark Ascending^a.
Serenade to Music

^aJames Ehnes *vn* Royal Liverpool

Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Manze
Onyx © ONYX4212 (69' • DDD)



Anyone looking for an introduction to the music of Vaughan Williams ought to

look no further than this new release of the composer's most popular orchestral works from Onyx, Andrew Manze and the RLPO. The CD comes in the wake of Manze's splendid cycle of Vaughan Williams's symphonies which, obviously more challenging in content, form and scale, might serve as the next stage of exploration. Although I miss the 16 solo voices and Shakespeare's words (which make the work so magical and unique) in the orchestral version of the *Serenade to Music*, Manze's sonorous interpretation is heartwarming and full of direction and purpose.

One can come no closer to Vaughan Williams's intimate relationship with English folk song than his *English Folk Song Suite* (in Gordon Jacob's orchestration) with its simple forms and truly memorable tunes. This is performed with an attractive élan in the outer movements and a sufficient sense of mystery in the more numinous slow movement. A similar haunting quality is conveyed by the *Fantasia on Greensleeves*, which never ceases to conjure scenes of pastoral tranquillity with its velvet scoring and adroit countermelodies. These are beautifully played by the RLPO and linger in the mind.

The three works, however, which are especially memorable on this recording are the wonderfully spacious interpretation of *The Lark Ascending*, the edifying *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and, perhaps epicentral to Vaughan Williams's character, *Five Variants of 'Dives and Lazarus'*. The clarity of James Ehnes's playing, with virtually flawless intonation, is relaxed and profoundly lyrical with a shaping of phrase and dynamic nuance I have not heard since the days of Hugh Bean on EMI. There is also a transparency to the orchestral sound which allows many of Vaughan Williams's inner contrapuntal lines to come through. Manze's tempos, moreover, are never too fast or too slow but always flexible. There is a glow about

the Fantasia, particularly the lovely solo quartet 'variation' and the climactic passages for the full ensemble before the reprise are splendidly warm and vibrant.

I retain my greatest accolade for the *Five Variants*, which is a wonderfully paced interpretation of this inventive variation form. The strings of the RLPO have a rich purple hue and Manze's control of the balance of the orchestra's rounded tone is beautifully judged and symptomatic of the deep sympathy he has for this music and these treasured scores. For all Vaughan Williams 'Liebhabers', this is a must!

Jeremy Dibble

Wagner

Der fliegende Holländer - Overture^a.

Lohengrin - Act 1, Prelude^b. Parsifal - Prelude^c.

Tannhäuser - Overture^d. Tristan und Isolde - Prelude and Liebestod^e

Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Andrés Orozco-Estrada

RCA Red Seal © 19075 96457-2 (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Basilika, Kloster Eberbach, Germany, ^eAugust 22, 2014; ^{cd}June 26, 2015;

^{ab}June 25, 2017



These overtures and preludes were recorded live in the Eberbach Abbey

basilica, whose resonant acoustic magnifies the unusually soft-grained character of Andrés Orozco-Estrada's interpretations. His approach is most effective when Wagner is evoking a spiritual atmosphere, as in the Prelude to Act 1 of *Lohengrin*, where the sonorities seem to float and flow effortlessly – aided by sweet, coolly ethereal playing from the Frankfurt Radio Symphony – like vaporous clouds in a cinematographic view of the heavens. There's a similar sense of otherworldly radiance in the Prelude to Act 1 of *Parsifal*, yet here the conductor elicits a more febrile tone from the strings, so one feels a throb of earthly pain. He manages to maintain a reasonably firm grip, too – no easy feat in such rhythmically and metrically elusive music – although his hold begins to slip in the final minutes.

It's the other way around in the *Tristan* Prelude. There's insufficient tension or mystery in the opening phrases with their profoundly pregnant pauses; and while he finds a natural forward movement once the basic tempo is established, it's not until around the eight-minute mark that there's adequate heat. I very much like the fragility he finds in the first part of the Liebestod, and the orchestra's shimmering textures



Gianandrea Noseda directs the London Symphony Orchestra in Shostakovich's notoriously tricky Fourth Symphony – see review on page 74

are lovely, but in general I find the performance too emotionally disengaged. Listen, for instance, to the long, gradually intensifying sequence starting at 4'32": it should feel ecstatic but instead one is made all too aware of metre and beat.

The Overture to *Der fliegende Holländer* is oddly small-scaled, with muted colours and flattened contrasts – like looking at an Old Master large-format painting in a small-scale, low-resolution photograph. Happily, the *Tannhäuser* Overture provides greater satisfaction. Orozco-Estrada's swift tempo for the opening pilgrims' chorus allows the music to sing with fervour, there's uncommon delicacy in the Venusberg music – not all that erotic, perhaps, but beguiling nonetheless – and the intricate string figuration when the pilgrims' chorus returns (at 11'29") is exquisitely played. A confoundingly mixed bag, all told.

Andrew Farach-Colton

'Quattro violini a Venezia'

Buonamente Sonata prima a quattro violini
Castello Sonata decima settima in ecco per due violini e due violini in ecco **Cavalli** Canzon a 3
Fontana Sonata 16 a tre violini **G Gabrieli** Canzon II a 6. Sonata XXI con tre violini **Marini** Canzon prima per quattro violini. Capriccio per sonare il violino con tre corde a modo di lira.

Sonata in ecco con tre violini. Sonata quarta per sonar con due corde **Rossi** Sinfonia a 5 & a 3 si placet. Sonata a quattro violini e doi chitarroni **Uccellini** Sinfonia decima nona a tre violini. Sinfonia decima settima a quattro violini **Clematis / Stéphanie de Failly, Brice Saily** Ricercar © RIC404 (65' • DDD)



Italian string music, but what distinguishes this release is its focus on works for four violins and continuo. It's a nice idea, and since many of these composers lived and worked in Venice and could have known each other – the violinists among them perhaps performing together in some of these very pieces – it presents the pleasing notion of a musical community exploring the possibilities of their relatively new instrument.

Although not all the pieces are actually for four violins – those being by Uccellini, Rossi, Buonamente (beautifully shaped), Castello (full of rhetorical flair and fire, as ever) and Marini – the idea is kept alive by including sonatas for three by Fontana, Gabrieli (his superbly managed *Sonata con*

tre violini), Uccellini (a catchy and dancy sinfonia) and a Marini sonata for one violin with wonderful overlapping echo effects from two more, as well as a couple of his cautious essays in double-stopping. There's also a trio sonata by Cavalli, which seems to have been included purely on the basis of its quality and eloquence – as good a reason as any.

The intelligence of the programming is backed up by the performances, which are stylish and engaging. Short gaps between some of the pieces keep our attention and prevent it all from sounding like a history lesson. No descriptions of the violins are given but they sound like the airy early 17th-century models appropriate to this music, played in a manner befitting their characterisation in Purcell's *Hail, bright Cecilia!*: 'brisk without lightness, without dullness grave'. The continuo serves shrewd and discreet combinations of bass viol, bassoon, harp, theorbo, guitar, organ and harpsichord.

The booklet states how, while recording, Clematis were reminded of the quality of the three slightly later sonatas for four violins by Legrenzi, which they themselves have recorded (9/16) and which, they say, 'bring this Venetian journey to an end'. Would it have hurt to import one of them to this disc? **Lindsay Kemp**

Mahler's Symphony No 8

Adám Fischer talks to Peter Quantrill about the monumental 'Symphony of a Thousand'

A hotel room bedecked with roses greeted Alma Mahler on her arrival in Munich in September 1910. Laid open on the table before her was the score receiving its heavily promoted premiere a few days later in front of a 3500-strong audience studded with cultural and political royalty. 'To my dear wife, Alma Maria,' read the inscription.

How to cut through all the noise in and around Mahler's Eighth Symphony? That dedication might be a good place to start, as an affirmation of mother love manifested in the memory of both his beloved mother Marie and his little daughter Maria Anna, in the idealised Virgin of Mahler's adopted faith, and in the sundry matters floating around the conclusion of Goethe's *Faust* as well as embodied in the figure of the 'nurturing' Alma. Having spent an afternoon with the composer in August 1910, Sigmund Freud diagnosed a 'Holy Mary complex'. 'Freud was quite right,' Mahler wrote to his wife from Munich, while he was directing rehearsals and she was dallying at a spa with the young architect Walter Gropius. 'You were always my light and my focal point!'

'I should not feel like a traffic cop,' admits Adám Fischer, the latest conductor to step into the composer's diminutive shoes. 'I should be able to forget all the technical challenges and concentrate on the music, but it's not always possible. The Eighth Symphony has a lot of logistical challenges unique even for Mahler. When I look at the first page of the score, I see the problems of coordinating the two choruses, which were placed 70 or 80 metres away from each other in the Düsseldorf Tonhalle. Usually, good music-making is about listening to the other musicians, but when the forces are so huge the reactions have to be anticipated. Orchestral musicians are used to this, but amateur singers aren't. I asked them not to breathe on my up-beat but in advance of it, so that the first "Veni" comes in like a rushing wind. Every singer on stage has to be ready for the whole of the first five minutes, and to really go for it.'

But in fact the *a cappella* hurling out of that choral statement launches quite a classical exposition of the movement's – and indeed the symphony's – main theme. For all the forces involved, there is a great deal of neoclassical writing informed by Mahler's recent study of Bach. 'This is one of the hidden challenges of the symphony,' says Fischer: 'to maintain a classical quality in performance.' The handsome former planetarium seats 2500, making it one of the smaller halls that will accommodate the Eighth. 'You have to save and emphasise the soft moments, otherwise it becomes coarse and tiring for the audience,' notes Fischer. 'In every venue you have to play the piece differently.'

There follows the first of Part 1's lyric interludes for the vocal soloists. Mahler marked the passage *a tempo* and 'somewhat (but imperceptibly) more moderate' – in a largely vain attempt to prevent his podium heirs from slamming on the brakes. But Fischer follows suit. 'It should feel slower without being slower! In the business, we have a phrase: "same tempo with a human face".' With a sympathetic team of singers,



Fischer and his Düsseldorf forces at the Tonhalle

such episodes bring Wagnerian parallels to mind. The Eighth is Mahler's *Meistersinger*, as a hymn to creativity itself – 'and a way to deal with critics!' adds Fischer.

A notorious black spot occurs at the centre of Part 1,

with the entry of the chorus on 'Accende lumen sensibus'. 'Mahler asks for the "Acc" to be separated from the first beat, but the silence shouldn't be too long,' says Fischer. 'It's like the pause within "Wach auf" in *Die Meistersinger*.' The organ returns, and Fischer is keen for its presence to be felt in conjunction with the symphony's singular juxtaposition of Latin and German texts. 'The organ is a key instrument for this movement, as a religious character. "I believe in something," says Mahler. "I believe in the organ, I believe in God." The organ is like God in the symphony.'

When I hook up with him, Fischer is in Berlin conducting *Don Giovanni*, an opera that Mahler the conductor revolutionised in performance – 'not as a collection of set pieces for singers but as a drama in music,' reported the *New York Sun* when he staged it at the Metropolitan Opera in January 1908. Fischer wonders why Mahler never composed an opera ('he should have done'), but concedes that in practice Part 2 of the Eighth Symphony is Mahler's opera, and at any rate not the last three movements of a traditional symphonic form that some commentators have vainly striven to argue lie concealed therein. After an orchestral prelude, the curtain rises on a procession of anchorites – 'Waldung, sie schwankt heran' – with a nod to *La damnation de Faust*, or perhaps *La forza del destino*. Fischer encouraged the male choruses

to declaim each word. 'When two or three hundred people do that it's not precise, but I think Mahler wanted it like that. To sing it legato kills the music.'


A pair of bass solos brings the most expressionist orchestral writing of the entire symphony, as Mahler stays on trend with the latest developments of Strauss and Schoenberg. 'If I have an interesting singer, I ask him for a crazy expression and let him find his own way.' Like Wotan, the resigned pessimist of *Die Walküre*'s second act, the Pater Profundus sings with agonised leaps of a seventh, a ninth and an eleventh ('Wie strack'). 'It's almost too much for a human,' says Fischer. 'If you hear the technical problems at this point, this is the sense of the music. It shouldn't sound easy, it's more than singing.'

The mood lightens with a French-accented flowermaiden chorus, 'Jene Rosen', and Mahler continues to draw on the history of music and make it his own. 'He wanted to express everything,' as Fischer says, 'like Goethe wanted to write a history of time in the second part of *Faust*. This is a book that everyone in Germany should read – but very few people get to the end.'

'If you heard a tenor sing the part of Doctor Marianus without any difficulty, then something would be lost'

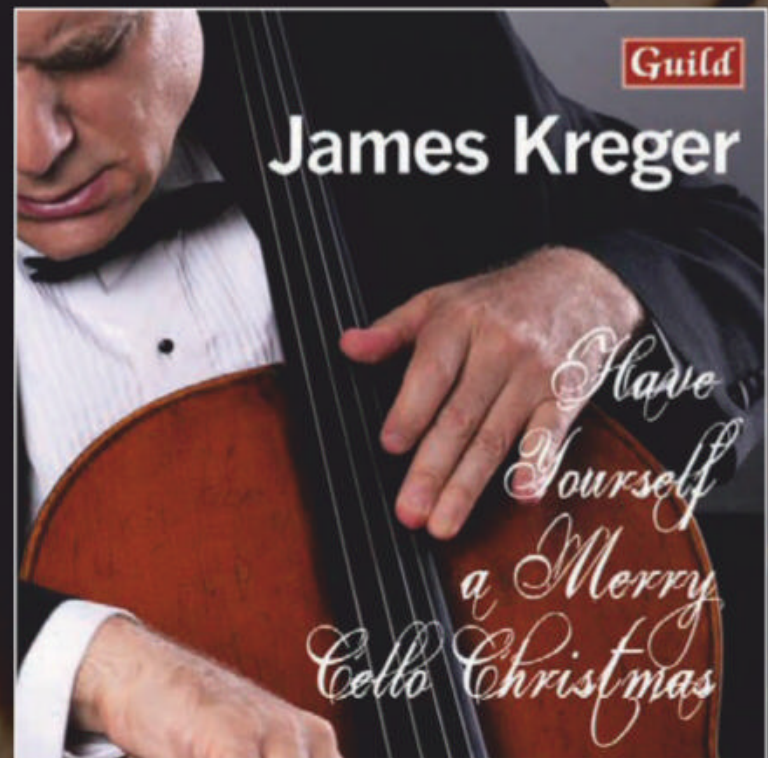
Mahler had lately effected a reconciliation with the poet Siegfried Lipiner, who had written a thesis about *Faust* and discussed the text in depth with him before the composer's marriage to Alma caused a serious rift: 'He was a bogus Goethe in his writing and a haggling Jew in his talk,' Alma later said of Lipiner, and that was that. But something of him perhaps survives in Mahler's Heldentenor portrait of the poem's enraptured philosopher, Doctor Marianus. Again, Fischer believes that in the unequal struggle to master the part lies an expressive truth. 'If you heard a tenor sing it without any difficulty, something would be lost.' On Marianus's first entry above the chorus he is almost inaudible in Düsseldorf, but Fischer – not without justified pride – points to Mahler's note in the score underneath 'Höchste Herrscherin der Welt': 'He should under no circumstances be conspicuous until now.'

Soprano and contralto vignettes eventually come together in a trio. 'They are searching for something, and then they find each other.' The penitent Gretchen enters. 'You have to make a space around her. We couldn't do that physically, but we achieved it with colours, I think: she began her solo with less vibrato than the others.' Finally, the Mater Gloriosa soars above: 'It must be the moment that we were waiting for all along. She should sound different from all the other soloists, that's clear. It's like we pray, we tell everything to heaven, and here is heaven's answer.'

Only with the final Chorus Mysticus are the full forces from Part 1 reunited and unleashed. Does the Eighth really deserve its reputation as an apogee of bombast? Fischer believes not. 'For our age it might seem that way. It's like the Mannheim crescendo in the 18th century. If you discover something new, you use it more often to start with. We should forget about the size of the orchestra. Of course, it is a mighty and incredible ending, but it is also very honest. I wanted to end with the same feeling as we started the concert, as if the whole symphony had lasted one second and an eternity at the same time.' 

► To read Gramophone's review of Fischer's Mahler Eighth turn to page ??

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Chamber



Rob Cowan enjoys 20th-century works from cellist Mischa Maisky:

'Maisky multitricks with himself eightfold for the Villa-Lobos, a well-integrated body of sound' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



Charlotte Gardner on a Baroque celebration of the art of variation:

'These composers knew that the most effective way to reel in the punters was to make their music a source of fun' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 87**

J Anderson

Another Prayer. The Bearded Lady. The Colour of Pomegranates. Poetry Nearing Silence.

Prayer. Ring Dance. Van Gogh Blue

Nash Ensemble / Martyn Brabbins

NMC © NMCD256 (78' • DDD)



This selection of six relatively small-scale chamber pieces by Julian Anderson

takes in works written between 1987 and 2015; and just like his larger-scale output from the same years, these compositions show increasing refinement of style and sharpening of dramatic atmosphere. The recordings, made at the Menuhin School over three days in April 2019, are not only technically immaculate but also demonstrate the Nash Ensemble's trademark commitment to contemporary repertoire that challenges performers in music blending forcefulness and economy, subtlety and spontaneity, to beguiling effect.

The programme order on the disc becomes strictly chronological if you play the two closely related pieces – *Prayer* (2009) for solo viola and *Another Prayer* (2012) for solo violin – together before the final item. As Anderson explains, his titles relate to Jewish traditions containing 'considerably more protest and struggle ... than is present in other religions'. This makes the 'sudden oasis of quietude and inner contemplation' with which both pieces end almost disconcertingly 'other', and demonstrates Anderson's imaginative reconfiguration of traditional genres. In a movement from *Poetry Nearing Silence* (1997) Anderson pays affectionate tribute to his 'favourite composer', Janáček, with just such a highly personal take on the briskly folk-like, avoiding any hint of parody.

In *Poetry Nearing Silence*, allusiveness is teasingly specific, with detailed references to Tom Phillips's book of poems and drawings, *The Heart of a Humument*. But there is never anything remotely laboured

about such cross-referencing. Similarly, the relation between the early *Ring Dance* for two violins and Norwegian Hardanger music, or between *The Bearded Lady* for clarinet and piano and the character (and music) of Baba the Turk in Stravinsky's opera *The Rake's Progress*, provides highly relevant context without weighing down Anderson's musical responses with inappropriate suggestions of ancestor worship.

Van Gogh Blue (2015) – the most recent work included – is an act of homage to another deeply troubled genius; and here the music gains special strength from a sense of compressing elements from the expressive worlds of works on a much larger scale, like the opera *Theban*s and the Violin Concerto. The lament-like ending reaches well-nigh expressionistic heights, yet the bold, flexible structures of *Van Gogh Blue* are the more impressive for avoiding the siren calls of ultimate disintegration. As Anderson unfailingly shows, an emphasis on 'protest and struggle' need not be musically incoherent.

Arnold Whittall

CPE Bach

Complete Original Works for Violin & Keyboard

Tamsin Waley-Cohen vn **James Baillieu** pf

Signum © ③ SIGCD573 (153' • DDD)



Contrary to the suggestion of its title, Daniel Dennett's book *From Bacteria*

to Bach and Back: The Evolution of Minds hardly discusses Bach at all. But the composer's name is not there just for alliteration or pun. Bach has become a symbol of genius, the apex of human endeavour; the very furthest from a unicellular organism that we can get. It is with this currency that the *New York Times* was able to run two articles earlier this year entitled 'Saturdays in the Bronx with Bach' and 'Yo-Yo Ma Wants Bach to Save the World'. Bach's name has become a

signifier for social miracle, purportedly possessing the power to mend political division and rebalance racial inequality.

But the Bach that these writers refer to is, of course, Johann Sebastian. His sons rarely get a look-in. This three-disc set from Tamsin Waley-Cohen and James Baillieu of the complete works for violin and keyboard by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach nudges us in the right direction. What we discover – immediately and sustained for 153 minutes and 12 seconds – is that CPE not only does justice to his father but also is a superb composer in his own right. We would do well to remember that for most of the 18th century, talk of 'the great Bach' referred to CPE and not JS.

Not much work has gone into organising the sonatas. They are presented in chronological order – or at least in order of their 'Wq' numbers, the catalogue system established by Alfred Wotquenne in 1905 (it has since fallen out of favour, to be superseded by the 'H number' system). As a result, the listening experience tracks the chapters of CPE's life, a journey which moves from the *galant* to the strange, experimental fantasia genre via *Sturm und Drang*. And yet, by serendipity, each disc has a stunning 'opener', disclosing a sound world perfect unto itself. Baillieu's touch in the *Adagio ma non molto* of the opening D major Sonata (Wq71 H502) is something remarkable. His lines are full of breath, intimate and expansive, shaped with a microscopic sensitivity. Trills glisten over Waley-Cohen, the perfect partner to transform this into bowed song. Waley-Cohen's achievement of pure legato is wondrous (though an unnecessary ornament disrupts the otherwise impeccably sustained broadness and reciprocity of counterpoint) and her sound is tinged with golden frailty. And though this sound world speaks of something more like a serene *Schwanengesang* than it does of a work by a hormonal teenager – CPE was only 17 years old when he composed the first three sonatas – it thoroughly works. My knees go weak at how the pair navigate

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Tamsin Waley-Cohen*

The intrepid violinist discusses the music of CPE Bach, having recorded all of the violin- and-keyboard works with pianist James Baillieu

What drew you to the music of CPE Bach?

Some years ago I kept coming across the music of CPE Bach on concert programmes, which piqued my interest, and I began to look into his music and his life. I listened to some recordings and was enthralled by the freedom and expressive range of his music.

Did you decide from the outset to record the complete works for violin and piano?

I first wanted to get to know the two books of his music for violin and keyboard. However, once I started to explore, there is such beauty, tenderness and humour everywhere that I felt that a complete set would be a wonderful project to embark upon. We also took the liberty of including the beautiful *Arioso*, which is a set of variations of great beauty, asks for the violin to be muted and has incredible dynamic and expressive contrasts, and the *Fantasia*, which is extraordinarily far-reaching and forward-looking, and a perfect example of his late *Emfindsamer Stil*, or 'sensitive style', in which emotion is valued above all else. It gives the impression of being inside someone's mind and heart in turmoil, almost to the point of breakdown, and surely leads the way directly to the music of the late Romantics. It has truly been a joy to get to know this music which is so full of affection for life.

This music seems to open up a wealth of expressive possibilities – is it hard to settle on an interpretation?

Indeed, the greatest challenge of this music for me was to free my mind of the Baroque or Classical constraints of structure that we are all thoroughly trained in! James and I discussed the improvisatory qualities of the music extensively, and we aimed to maintain this in the recording studio as well. Of course, in the end, only one version can go on the disc!

The rule book has been completely thrown out by Bach: phrase lengths are irregular and harmonic modulations often unexpected, and even quite wild. For me, this encapsulates the Enlightenment philosophy that CPE Bach was heavily involved with. Free will reigns supreme and the individual is given the highest value.

Are there any difficulties with instrumental balance when playing this music?

Because we both use modern instruments – well, my violin is 300 years old, but the set-up is modern – balance was not really an issue. Of course, most of the time, the keyboard is *prima voce*. The violin's role is often to



support from within, or catching the phrases of the piano, which is extremely fun! I also learnt a great deal about how to create a successful inner line, which is hugely valuable to a violinist who is often the soprano part.

Of course, using modern instruments affected the type of balance as a modern piano has a greater range than a harpsichord, for example, and given CPE Bach's extraordinary dynamic markings as well as his well documented fascination with the development of the keyboard, we felt that he would have enjoyed the possibilities the modern instrument offers.

the interrupted cadence towards the end of the movement, a gesture which spins out into nostalgic arioso and an ending of exquisite vulnerability.

That's the first movement of 27. We're also treated to a sublime *Largo* in the Sonata in B flat (Wq77 H513): Waley-Cohen transforms melancholy into sumptuous heartbreak, a moment of F major where the earth stops spinning for an *appoggiatura* – a 'but I love you' – and then tries to resume life as it was, but knows in meandering melody that it simply can't once those words have been spoken. The loveliness is unceasing. The *Arioso* theme of the Variations in A (Wq79 H535) is enough to unhardened the most hardened of hearts – and these eight bars alone make the entire listening experience worth it. Baillieu's rhythmic variation in the repeat is lined with thoughtfulness and honesty, the

subtlest smell of *inéale* lingers over his unravelling quavers, while Waley-Cohen purrs beneath with *con sordino* velvet. Three discs of wonderful music-making, enough to make any father proud. **Mark Seow**

Beethoven • Brahms

Beethoven Clarinet Trio, Op 38

Brahms Clarinet Trio, Op 114

Alexander Bedenko *cl* **Kyryl Zlotnikov** *vc*

Itamar Golan *pf*

Orchid © ORC100102 (62' • DDD)



Beethoven presented his Septet to the Viennese public in April 1800 as part of a marathon concert that also included the premiere performance his First Symphony.

Such was the Septet's success that a few years later he arranged the work for clarinet, cello and piano to render it more suitable for domestic music-making. While I'm probably not alone in greatly preferring the richer colour palette of the original, the trio version is extremely effective in its own terms.

The several recordings I've heard of Op 38 emphasise the music's *gemütlich* qualities – Eduard Brunner, Boris Pergamenschikow and Vassily Lobanov on Tudor are marvellously sweet-tempered – but this new account takes a completely different tack, and suggests that Beethoven set out to dazzle more than to charm. Indeed, Alexander Bedenko, Kyryl Zlotnikov and Itamar Golan play with such fire and panache that they nearly persuaded me the arrangement is the equal of the original. I say nearly because occasionally

a brittleness creeps into their performance. Listen, say, to their clipped articulation and flip phrasing in the third-movement *Tempo di menuetto*. These moments are disconcerting because otherwise the musicians characterise so vividly and with real affection. I love the play of textures they bring to the opening *Allegro con brio*, alternating spiky with silky, for example, and they make magic in the *Adagio cantabile*'s surprising shift from E flat to C major (listen starting around 3'30").

Timbrally, the performances are ravishing. Bedenko's tone is the most luxurious velvet and an effective foil for Zlotnikov's tensile yet supple sound – think fine-grained leather – and both are set off by the coruscating clarity of Golan's fingerwork. I wish the engineers had given the cello a bit more presence, as he sometimes gets buried in the resonant studio acoustic. This imbalance is somewhat more noticeable in the Brahms but it's a minor blemish, and musically the interpretation is wholly convincing in its careful balance of full-throated fervour and tender delicacy. It abounds in marvellous details, too, like the liquid *pianissimo* scales at the end of the *Allegro*'s exposition (at 3'32") and again in the coda. They make the *Andantino grazioso* one of the most delectable of Brahms's many waltzes, and the finale stays light on its feet but still packs an emotional punch. Warmly recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven

Three Violin Sonatas, Op 12. Variations on 'Se vuol ballare' from Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro', WoO40

James Ehnes *vn* **Andrew Armstrong** *pf*
Onyx © ONYX4177 (68' • DDD)



With some discs, you can just tell that everything's going to go like a dream. And

it's not just that I've never yet heard a disappointing recording from James Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong. The energy and bounce of the way they play the opening flourish of Beethoven's Sonata Op 12 No 1 initially made me start; but within that opening phrase you can feel Ehnes applying just enough articulation to make it clear that this is going to be part of the musical argument, as well as the dramatic opening gesture that the 27-year-old Beethoven surely intended.

The freshness and spontaneity of these interpretations is unfaltering, as is the instantaneous rapport and subtle, crystal-

clear tonal beauty of the pair's playing. They lean into the *Andante* of No 1 in a way that allows both grace and a lilting sense of momentum, and launch Op 12 No 2 as if *in medias res*: with a dancing scherzo-like swing in which Armstrong's left hand manages to provide both a rhythmic springboard for his partner's phrasing and a frequently droll punchline to Beethoven's youthful witticisms.

These are, after all, 'Sonatas for Pianoforte and Violin' – a paradox that I've rarely heard so masterfully resolved on modern instruments. These players are simply on the same page as each other. The slow movements of Nos 2 and 3 are simultaneously intimate and pregnant with a sense of greater things; and the central tempest of No 3's first movement is handled without any loss either of tension or clarity. The variations on 'Se vuol ballare', deliciously played, make an irresistibly playful encore to a disc which should give all but the most humourless of listeners consistent and unqualified delight.

Richard Bratby

Chopin

Grande fantasia sur des airs polonais, Op 13 (arr Thoma). Krakowiak, Op 14 (arr Thoma). Piano Trio, Op 8 (arr Draheim). Six Songs
Johann Blanchard *pf* **Parnassus Academy**
Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG303 2110-2 (74' • DDD)



Chopin discs come and go, with all the usual titles making claims to our

attention. Here, for once, is a quite novel and refreshing one. At the centre is a fine performance of the Piano Trio, an early work and, in the opinion of more than one commentator, not among Chopin's best. What makes this recording unique is that the violin is substituted by the viola. This, according to a letter from Chopin to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski written in August 1830, was Chopin's original intention – and looking at the violin part you can see his reasoning, for it rarely moves into a high register. 'Therefore', wrote Chopin, 'the viola will be stronger against the cello.' In the event, despite it being offered as a Trio 'pour Piano, Violon ou Alto & Violoncello', it was eventually published in the form we know it today. Joachim Draheim, who has reconstructed Chopin's original plan, writes in the booklet that his 'task was astonishingly simple', with only minimal changes needed in the first, second and

fourth movements and none at all in the third.

But of course this Trio is all about the piano, not the strings, and Johann Blanchard brings all the necessary energy and drive needed to give a strong narrative sense to the relentless bustle of the writing. There's plenty else to admire in his playing but I wonder if he has not been placed too far behind his colleagues, a position that seems to be MDG's favoured balance for chamber music recordings.

If the Trio is of great interest in this guise and rewarding to hear in this performance, so is the rest of the Parnassus Academy's enterprising collection: the *Fantasy on Polish Airs* and *Krakowiak Rondo* – too rarely heard these days – are played in versions for piano and string quintet. These lend a wonderfully intimate atmosphere to proceedings, showing that Chopin's music for the concert hall can work equally effectively in the salon with little loss of background colour. Either side of the Trio are Chopin's Six Polish Songs divided into two sets, the vocalist replaced by the cello (the always eloquent Michael Gross). I think I preferred these to the originals every bit as much as I do Liszt's transcriptions for piano solo.

Jeremy Nicholas

Labor

Piano Quartet, Op 6. Piano Quintet, Op 3^a
Nina Karmon *vn* **Pauline Sachse** *va* **Justus Grimm** *vc* ^a**Niek de Groot** *db* **Oliver Triendl** *pf*
Capriccio © C5390 (67' • DDD)



Poor Josef Labor (1842-1924), blind from the age of three, known to us now

almost entirely through his use to others. Labor's praise set the young Schoenberg on his path. He must have been a patient man as well as teacher, in service to blue-blooded royalty as well as the musical kind, including the princesses of Hanover and Alma Schindler. Not without reward: after the death of his patron, George V of Hanover, in 1865, he became a kind of house musician to the Wittgenstein family. Paul commissioned several left-hand works from Labor after losing his right arm in the First World War, but these chamber works date from the 1890s.

Labor himself studied with Simon Sechter, Viennese paragon of contrapuntal instruction, and so given his obscurity you might anticipate a fluent command of ultimately undistinguished material. This is true of the blustery outer movements of the

Piano Quintet but the Scherzo's first Trio is a happy and spacious episode, evoking the same twilight atmosphere as Schumann's fantasy pieces, while the second is a rustic affair making the most of the unusual instrumentation with double bass (Labor wrote the part with the principal bassist of the VPO in mind).

The opening theme of the Quintet's *Andante* finds Labor at his most Brahmsian, but nominative determinists should hold fire: he makes light work of the slow movements in both pieces, and so do the performers. However, their fine balance between confidence and restraint is not matched by the close recorded sound, which does no favours to an idiom at its most inspired in a mood of wakeful dreaming. The Quartet's high point is a third-movement *Quasi allegretto*, another nocturne which taps the introverted vein of Labor's better-known organ music. It clears like mist before the proud, anthem-like first subject of the finale, which strikes sparks off a scampering, Mendelssohnian second theme towards an intently plotted climax of well-earned high spirits. Labor took pains to bridle and harness Alma's teenage creative powers, 'to derive various moods from a single theme', and unlike some teachers, he practised what he preached. **Peter Quantrill**

Molique

'Chamber Music, Vol 2'

Duo concertant. Flute Quintet. Introduction, Andante and Polonaise, Op 43. Piano Quartet, Op 71

Parnassus Academy

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG303 2132-2 (72' • DDD)



I think I have found a new friend. Immediately appealing, charming and, if not greatly original in thought or language, genial company. Some may complain, stating the obvious, that my friend is thoroughly undemanding. But is it only demanding, challenging people that command our interest and merit our friendship?

Following the disc of Molique world premieres I reviewed in the September issue, here is another selection of his chamber music to coincide with the 150th anniversary of his death. My new friend, the Piano Quartet, has three movements with a string of attractive themes and ideas. 'Think Jane Austen' might give you an idea of what to expect, an admix of Hummel and Mendelssohn

with a sprinkling of graceful Mozart to colour the slow movement, none of whom, however, could be mistaken for the quartet's composer.

Molique's Op 71 comes last on the disc. If the piano is positioned slightly too far from the strings (a balance that favours the leader's nasal up-beats), the flute feels even more separated in the Flute Quintet. Considering that the flute in effect takes the place of the first violin in an otherwise conventional string quintet line-up, the balance militates against the complete success of the recording, not helped by a somewhat thin-toned flute. Yet it is hard not to take to this four-movement work (it lasts just short of half an hour) with a Scherzo of unusual structure and a catchy, puckish rondo finale.

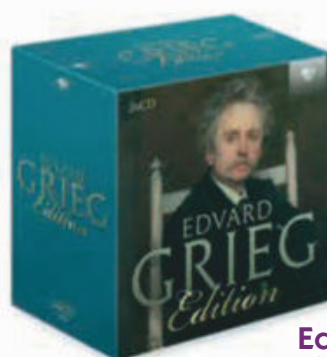
I can't say I was equally taken by the *Introduction, Andante and Polonaise* for flute and piano (13'25") or the *Duo concertant* for flute and violin, though they are pleasant enough. But Molique, while he is no Schubert or Schumann, deserves far more attention than he currently enjoys and his music should attract chamber groups well beyond the commercial interest in his 150th anniversary. And now back to my new friend! **Jeremy Nicholas**

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Mozart

String Quartets – No 14, K387; No 15, K421.
Divertimento, K138

Van Kuijk Quartet

Alpha ⑤ ALPHA551 (67' • DDD)



The Van Kuijk's second disc of Mozart's 'Haydn' Quartets builds on

their growing reputation as one of the foremost young European ensembles and demonstrates that the BBC backed a winner by making this group one of its New Generation Artists (2015-17). Their playing once again exhibits fearlessness and pinpoint accuracy, deeply considered blend and a palpable joy in the colour palette available to the string quartet. They have been captured in ideal sound at the Teldex Studio in south west Berlin, miked to give a beautiful, atmospheric 'ring' while coming in close enough to make the listener aware of the human interactions with wooden instruments: the occasional up-beat sniff or snap of string on fingerboard.

An adherence (by and large) to Mozart's dynamic and expression markings goes a long way towards defining the structure of these Viennese works. The occasional 'inorganic' intervention, too, heightens the characterisation: there's a cheeky moment of *sul ponticello* towards the close of the Minuet of the G major Quartet (K387), and all four players clearly have fun pulling around the Scotch snaps of the Trio of the D minor (K421) or tripping through the incongruously light-hearted 'third subject' that punctures the wiry counterpoint of K387's finale.

The jam in the sandwich is one of the three Divertimentos composed by the 16-year-old Mozart in Salzburg: not the ever-popular D major (K136) but the third of the set, in F. The Van Kuijk play it as if it's every bit as deely felt and finely wrought as the two mature works, lavishing the full glory of their tone on the outer movements and lingering in the slow movement just long enough to acknowledge that, even as a teenager, Mozart knew how to exploit aching dissonance to create a beguiling emotional and dramatic effect. **David Threasher**

Ravel

'Voyageur'

Violin Sonatas – No 1; No 2. Berceuse sur le nom de Gabriel Fauré. Kaddish (arr Garban). Cinq Mélodies populaires grecques (arr M Milstein). Pièce en forme de habanera. Tzigane

Maria Milstein *vn* **Nathalia Milstein** *pf*

Mirare ⑤ MIR416 (62' • DDD)



Ravel's music for violin and piano is easily overlooked as a facet of his output

but stretches over almost his entire career and makes for a cohesive recital, as the Milstein sisters confirm.

That the so-called 'Posthumous' Sonata openly exhibits its stylistic debt to Franck and Fauré does not lessen its formal ingenuity (as Enescu, who likely gave the 1897 premiere, recalled in his *Torso-Sonata* 14 years on) or emotional poise. It receives a thoughtful reading by the Milsteins, who are hardly less successful in the mature Violin Sonata – the searching fragility of its first movement followed with the most probing among Ravel's blues-inflected studies, then a *Perpetuum mobile* of unstoppable impetus viscerally rendered by these musicians.

If the Milsteins are less at home in *Tzigane*, this is because its gypsy inspiration needs astute handling for the expressive contours not to feel stylised or contrived. More convincing is the ethereal *Berceuse* in homage to Fauré, together with three transcriptions – the suave *Pièce en forme de habanera*, the sombrely eloquent *Kaddish* and those winsome miniatures inspired by Greek popular melodies, which have been idiomatically transcribed by the present violinist.

Competition is considerable in this repertoire: Alina Ibragimova and Cédric Tiberghien give performances of greater expressive immediacy, coupled with the Violin Sonata by Guillaume Lekeu; Lena Neudauer and Paul Rivinius are similarly commanding, with a major addition in Ravel's Sonata for violin and cello. Yet the Milsteins convey genuine insight into this music and their disc, with its excellent sound and imaginative annotations, is worth investigating.

Richard Whitehouse

Selected comparisons:

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (A/11) (HYPE) CDA67820

Neudauer, Rivinius (8/13) (HANS) CD98 002

Telemann

'Telemann's Garden'

Paris Quartet No 3, TWV43:G4. Solo Flute

Fantasia No 1, TWV40:2. Solo Harpsichord

Fantasia No 7, TWV33:19 – Lentement. Solo

Violin Fantasia No 9, TWV40:42 – Siciliana.

Sonata No 9, TWV41:e5 – Recitativo ed Arioso.

Suite No 5, TWV42:a3. Trio Sonata No 10,

TWV42:a4

Elephant House Quartet

Pentatone ⑤ PTC5186 749 (59' • DDD)

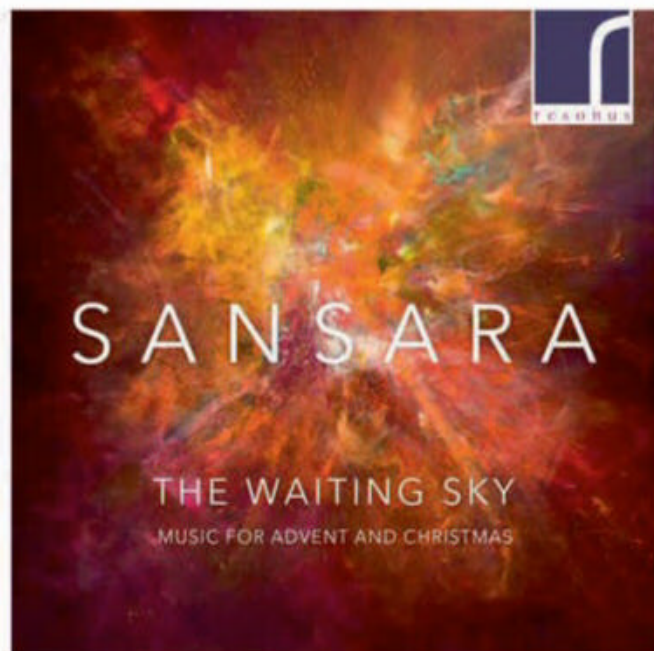


In conversation with the *New York Times* in 2008, Alan Gilbert remarked that just

'because you can give a title to a program doesn't make it a good program ... By the same token, a program that doesn't necessarily have a name or a stated, expressible theme is not necessarily an un-thought-out idea'. The compulsion to thematise everything unfortunately reached the classical music recording industry long ago. It strikes nauseating heights with this disc, supposedly a 'stunningly beautiful and colourful world of Telemann's musical garden'. I can just about buy this. But Elephant House Quartet spin out the metaphor long after it deserves to be spun: the recording is a 'musical bouquet which is balanced and colourful just like flowers from Telemann's garden; some perfumed profoundly in a fashionable French style, some rooted closely in his native German style'. Truth be told, these pieces have nothing to do with our gardening composer. They are simply a collection of nice pieces by Telemann: the theme is unnecessary and does more to irritate than it does to cohere.

Ludicrous theme and introduction to the booklet notes aside, this disc has glorious moments of music-making. After an underwhelming *Lentement* for solo harpsichord – not all CDs need to prelude out of silence, another structural gimmick that I would happily axe here – the recording really gets going. The Suite No 5 in A minor is entirely delightful, full of character and charm. Recorder player Bolette Roed's sound is completely intoxicating. Gambist Reiko Ichise plays with both nimble ferocity and exhilarating resonance. The treatment of Telemann's strange metric moments in the *Vivace* could be stranger still: Elephant House Quartet pass these volatile changes of time signature by as if nothing remotely weird has happened. But this is music that precisely shouldn't sound like a stroll through a garden.

The disc intersperses the works for ensemble with solo movements that cast spotlights on the individual members of the quartet and the unique timbres of their instruments, though some of the spotlights lack shine. I'm not sure what purpose violinist Aureliusz Goliński's cadenza before the B minor Siciliana seeks to serve: it is out of place and takes away from the sublime simplicity of Telemann's opening. The Siciliana itself lacks dance: Goliński's



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Beethoven Transformed, Volume I
Boxwood & Brass



Johann Joachim Quantz: Flute Concertos
Elysium Ensemble



In No Strange Land: Music by Martin Bussey
Sonoro, Michael Higgins (organ),
Neil Ferris (conductor)



INVENTA

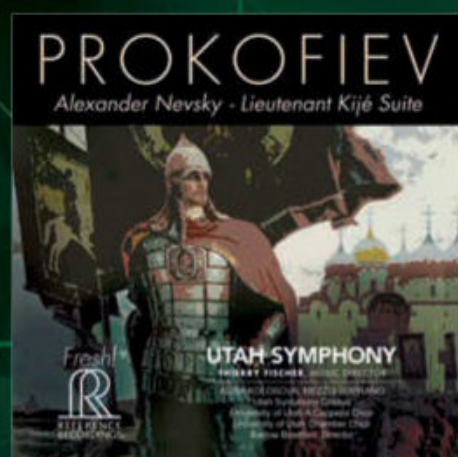
Handel Uncaged: Cantatas for Alto
Lawrence Zazzo (countertenor)



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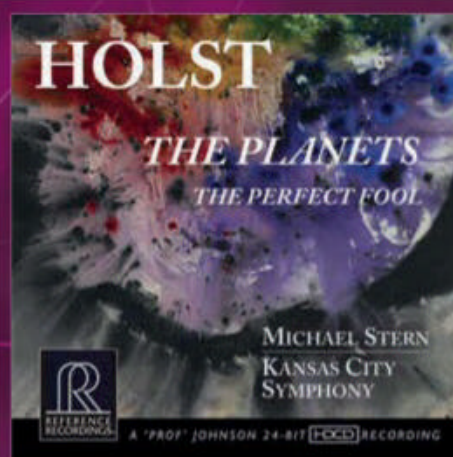
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phrases are glued in legato. Very little is done in terms of hierarchy or G-string resonance to bring out Telemann's counterpoint. An album scattered with the wonderful and the bland. **Mark Seow**

'20th Century Classics'

Bartók Romanian Folk Dances, Sz56^a **Bloch** From Jewish Life – Prayer^a **Britten** Cello Sonata, Op 65^a **Messiaen** Quatuor pour la fin du temps^a – Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus; Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus **Piazzolla** Le Grand Tango^a **Prokofiev** Romeo and Juliet, Op 64 – Dance of the Girls with Lilies^a **Shostakovich** The Limpid Stream, Op 39 – Adagio^a **Stravinsky** Mavra – Russian Song^a **Villa-Lobos** Bachianas Brasileiras No 1 – Preludio^b **Webern** Three Little Pieces, Op 11^a. Two Pieces^a **Yusupov** Cello Concerto^b **Mischa Maisky** vc^a **Lily Maisky** pf^b **Lucerne Symphony Orchestra / Benjamin Yusupov** DG © (two discs for the price of one) 483 7289GH2 (116' • DDD)



The most interesting item here is a wild amalgam of folk-derived dance music

and orchestral rabble-rousing from Tajikistan-born Benjamin Yusupov, his Cello Concerto, the second movement (of four) like *Schelomo* on Russian soil, its billowing climaxes not dissimilar to those in Bloch's masterpiece. Misha Maisky's playing is all that you could wish for. You'll find the Concerto on a bonus disc that sits aside the main programme. Prior to Yusupov, Maisky multitricks with himself eightfold for the *Preludio* to Villa-Lobos's *Bachianas Brasileiras* No 1, a well-integrated body of sound, fleshy and warmly expressive.

Maisky's very individual brand of tonal intensity suits some pieces better than others, the *Adagio* from *The Limpid Stream* by Shostakovich responding especially well to his approach, Britten's tragicomic Sonata too, whereas Stravinsky's deceptively simple 'Russian Maiden's Song' is too fussy by half and in Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* the harmonics in the fifth dance (taken very slowly) aren't always spot-on, intonation-wise, though the succeeding 'Dance from Bucium' is beautifully played. As to music from Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* (the fifth and eighth movements, the latter transcribed from its violin original), they're tender, no doubt about that, and sincerely expressed, but maybe just a tad too demonstrably emotional – too much of this world rather than of the next, perhaps?

That's the way I hear it, though you couldn't fault the actual quality of Maisky's playing. Piazzolla's 12-minute *Le Grand Tango* (written for Rostropovich) lives up to its title and the Maiskys (Misha and pianist Lily) suggest a very Latin brand of passion caught on the wing. Miniatures by Prokofiev and Webern effectively interpreted complete a programme that, viewed as a piece, scores many more hits than misses. **Rob Cowan**

'Strangers in Paradise'

Enescu Violin Sonata No 3, 'Dans le caractère populaire roumain', Op 25 **Prokofiev** Violin Sonata No 1, Op 80 **Ravel** Violin Sonata No 2 **Ysaÿe** Solo Violin Sonata, 'Ballade', Op 27 No 3 **Diana Tishchenko** vn **Zoltán Fejérvári** pf Warner Classics © 9029 54039-1 (74' • DDD)



When the Ukrainian violinist Diana Tishchenko won the 2018 Long Thibaud

Crespin Competition in Paris she was the indisputable winner. In the recital finals she'd shown her strong chamber colours; and while others had perhaps captured greater stylistic diversity better – her darkly spiky Prokofiev was powerful but her Beethoven language was much the same – her final Mendelssohn Violin Concerto was genuinely fantastic. Now here is her prize-winning album, celebrating Paris's historic pull on an international complement of internationally minded musicians, and I've no doubt that this is the beginning of a relationship set to stretch beyond Warner's one-album competition obligation.

Full marks first to the repertoire choices: four 20th-century sonatas with big personalities. While undoubtedly it's a programme playing to Tishchenko's strengths, what also struck me is that, while in Paris I was one of a few critics for whom her larger-than-life-ness didn't always hit the spot, on record I'm hearing a genuinely distinctive, individual voice which is far from eccentric.

The disc opens with Ravel's Second Violin Sonata, which instantly grabs attention with its beauty of tone, polish and range of colours. Tishchenko's delicately lyrical first-movement lines flit between cloaked and luminous, and the high-register work sounds sweet as nectar. Her second-movement pizzicato glows in the ample warmth of the recording acoustic.

The folk-reminiscent exoticism of Enescu's Sonata No 3 is another perfect vehicle for Tishchenko's dramatic

predilections and vast colouristic palette. The solid bond between her and Zoltán Fejérvári is unmissable here, such is the glued-together ease with which the pair bring off its quasi-improvisatory style. As for approach, within the context of Tishchenko honouring Enescu's minutely detailed dynamic markings, it's interesting to compare her smoothly voluptuous reading with the sterner, more primitive sound served up by Enescu's protégé, Menuhin. Perhaps the most striking instance of this comes at 4'30" in the final *Allegro con brio*, where the upwards-flick-then-downwards-glissando which under Menuhin's fingers was merely a subtle inflection has become an exuberantly naughty wolf whistle. Fejérvári is with Tishchenko all the way, becoming more pianistic and less cimbalom-esque in the process, but attractively so.

The Prokofiev is as spot-on as it was in Paris, although if you want those outer-movement scalic passages that Prokofiev wanted to sound 'like wind in a graveyard' to move like a seamless tail of air then you might find Tishchenko slightly notey. Among recent recordings, my money's still on Alexandra Conunova (Aparté, 8/18).

Charlotte Gardner

'Twentieth Century Oboe Sonatas'

Bowen Oboe Sonata, Op 85 **Bozza** Oboe Sonata **Dutilleux** Oboe Sonata **Eben** Oboe Sonata, Op 1 **Poulenc** Oboe Sonata **Saint-Saëns** Oboe Sonata, Op 166

Alex Klein ob **Phillip Bush** pf Cedille © CDR90000 186 (79' • DDD)



If instruments have characters, the oboe, surely, is among the most candid. In a

personal note appended to the booklet note to this disc, Alex Klein, the Brazilian-born former principal oboe of the Chicago Symphony, explains that he has 'a certain nostalgia' about some of the pieces here. Having rebuilt his technique and his orchestral career after suffering from focal dystonia, he comments that 'I don't know how long I have left to play the oboe'. Yet the musical impression here is life-affirming: a repertoire – and an artist – rich in playfulness, sincerity and wit.

It's a generous programme too. Saint-Saëns was born in 1835 and Dutilleux died in 2013, and the styles covered by these six pieces (including, in the Dutilleux and the Poulenc, at least two masterpieces) range from York Bowen's high Impressionism



Radiant lyricism and warmth: Alex Klein offers a generous survey of 20th-century oboe sonatas

to the Messiaen-like overtones of Eugène Bozza's fascinating Sonata; the only work here that goes beyond a concise three-movement layout. There are family resemblances between these works, but Klein's eloquent articulation and rich, lucid tone can adapt to all manner of sound worlds, sometimes on the twist of a phrase, whether Dutilleux's nocturnal mysteries, Petr Eben's pert neoclassicism or – the emotional peak of the programme – Poulenc's masterly late Sonata, in which cries of anguish mingle with playing of radiant lyricism and warmth.

Coming straight after such intensity, Saint-Saëns's guileless mock-baroquery – another late work – provides a perfect emotional release, and the disc ends in sunny high spirits. Phillip Bush, on piano, is an alert and sympathetic partner throughout, bringing a lovely simplicity to the more inward moments and providing an invigorating (but never aggressive) rhythmic kick where required. A fine survey of some rewarding music.

Richard Bratby

'Variety'

'The Art of Variation'

Biber *Fidicinium sacro-profanum* – Sonatas Nos 1 & 3. *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* – Partias Nos 1 & 5. Solo Violin Sonata No 6 **Fux** *Rondeau a 7* **Schmelzer** *Sonatae unarum fidium* – Sonata No 3

Les Passions de l'Âme / Meret Lüthi *vn*

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19075 91957-2 (61' • DDD)



Last album it was musical jokes. This time it's the art of variation form. But while on paper 'Variety' may sound like a more serious-minded affair than its predecessor, 'Schabernack' (8/17), that's without reckoning on the bubbly *joie de vivre* with which Berne-based Les Passions de l'Âme approach everything they touch. In fact the whole premise of this album (which incidentally has director Meret Lüthi and her fellow violinist Sabine Stoffer on a beautiful borrowed pair of Stainer violins) is that its three generations of self-made social-climber composers knew that the most effective way to reel in the punters for their expensively printed music was to make it a source of fun: challenging but not unintelligible in both technical and listening terms, with plenty to tickle the ear.

This band are experts in tickling the senses, too, beginning with their distinctive overall sound: the presence of the ringing dulcimer; the delicacy of texture and attack; the flowingly rhythmic rise and fall accentuating the Baroque repertoire's

dance roots; the use of dainty percussion such as khartal and tamburello. Fux's *Rondeau a 7* – featuring some deliciously light bassoon-playing from Gabriele Gombi – illustrates all this beautifully; and if you really want to appreciate how distinctive the playing is then look up the readings from Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Reinhard Goebel.

Also worth pointing out with this particular programme is the extent to which modes of expression are as much an unfolding story as its melodic lines. For instance, flip to Schmelzer's Sonata No 3 in G minor from his *Sonatae unarum fidium* of 1664, whose opening lyric pathos tips into lighter-heartedness once the quavers kick in with their implied polyphony, complete with a surprise joyous kick at 2'02"; and from here Lüthi's violin leads us through a constantly shifting landscape of different dynamics, attacks and tones.

The concluding work, Biber's Partia No 5 from his *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa*, serves up yet more treasures: the punchy rhythm and bright grip of the duetting violins' sound; the textural luxuriousness, timbral variety and sheer glow on display over the Aria's combination of two violins, dulcimer and organ; the lightly worn jauntiness of the *Balletto presto*'s walking bass. I could go on: Les Passions de l'Âme have served up yet another life-affirming cracker. **Charlotte Gardner**

Rudolf Firkušný

Tully Potter recalls the immense pianistic talents of the Moravian musician whose life straddled the 20th century, intersecting with two of his homeland's biggest composers

Of all the notable 20th-century Czech pianists, Rudolf Firkušný was surely the greatest. His long life (1912-94) intersected crucially with two of the 'big four' composers of his homeland, and he played a wide repertoire with penetration and immaculate technique.

'Ruda' was born in Napajedla, Moravia, on February 11, 1912. Fate took him at a tender age to Brno, where he showed such promise that when he was five his mother, Karla, took him to meet Janáček – who corrected Ruda's tempo in a Dvořák Slavonic dance, then played him the *Moonlight* Sonata finale. For 11 years, Ruda was like a son to Janáček: 'He opened for me the gates of music. Our conversations were always serious, always at an adult level.' In 1929-30 Ruda studied composition with Suk.

Firkušný's mentors helped him balance concerts with learning and he made debuts in Prague in 1923, Vienna in 1926, Berlin in 1927, Paris in 1928 and London in 1933 – the year he moved to Paris. Wishing to study with Cortot, he was told by the great man: 'You don't need a teacher, you need a public.' He kept in touch with home, performing Dvořák's Piano Concerto with George Szell in Prague and introducing both Pavel Bořkovec's First Concerto (in 1934) and Martinů's Second (1935) (his close comradeship with Martinů was lifelong) with the Czech Philharmonic under Václav Talich. His grasp of the Austro-German style was consolidated in lessons with Artur Schnabel: 'He was a great influence on me, not so much pianistically as musically.'

After his dramatic emigration, ahead of

the advancing Germans, Firkušný became part of New York's Czech expatriate community, helping his friends Jarmila Novotná and Jan Masaryk to publicise the Nazis' rape of their country. After the war, out of sympathy with the new Prague regime, he developed his US career, premiering concertos by Menotti (1945), Hanson (1948) and Martinů (the Third, 1949) and making regular sorties to Europe. While indisputably

a soloist (a regular with the New York Philharmonic), he flouted the American view that pianists who played chamber music were 'accompanists'. Records document partnerships with Pierre Fournier, Erica Morini, Tossy Spivakovsky, Nathan Milstein, William Primrose, Gregor Piatigorsky, János Starker and several quartets.

Blessed with good looks and ever dapper, both on and

off stage, Firkušný had impeccable good manners and could have passed for a central European ambassador. Whether in recital or concerto, he was always exhaustively prepared: his playing had crystalline finish and clarity, drawing attention to the music rather than to himself. A more extrovert warhorse was Brahms's First Concerto.

He campaigned for Dvořák's Piano Concerto, initially using the edition by his teacher Vilém Kurz but gradually shedding Kurz's accretions (many live and studio recordings chart this progress). He once told me how Dvořák had admonished a pianist of the day with the words, 'A 16th-note is a 16th-note!' Firkušný's strict note values and crisp rhythms in the concerto and the Op 81 Piano Quintet were reproaches to 'star' pianists from Schnabel to Richter.

His playing had crystalline finish and clarity, drawing attention to the music rather than to himself

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1915 – *Moves to Brno, aged three*

Father, Rudolf, dies 1915; family moves to Brno, where aged four he begins piano lessons, and at five meets Janáček. Playing in public by 1922.

•1927 – *Enters Prague conservatoire*

After studies with Růžena Kurzová and 1923 Prague debut, enters Prague conservatoire to study with Vilém Kurz (piano) and Rudolf Karel (composition). Graduates 1929 with performance of own Piano Concerto.

•1933 – *Moves to Paris*

Makes move thanks to President TG Masaryk. Joins Czech artistic colony including composers Martinů and Kaprálová.

•1938 – *Association with the US begins*

Makes disappointing US debut at New York Town Hall, but returns to the city on December 17, 1940, having fled Paris. Plays better Town Hall recital in 1941, and plays Dvořák Piano Concerto with Beecham and Chicago SO at 1941 Ravinia Festival; 1942, Mendelssohn's G minor with New York Philharmonic SO.

•1946 – *In – and out – of Czechoslovakia*

Returns to Czechoslovakia for first Prague Spring festival, which he and musicologist brother Leoš help to organise. Breaks arm before 1947 festival, and 1948 Communist takeover closes country to him for four decades, excepting family visits.

•1990 – *Returns in triumph to Prague*

Many concerts in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic over next few years; CDs with Czech Philharmonic, Václav Neumann, Jiří Bělohlávek, Libor Pešek, Gabriela Beňačková, Josef Suk and Panocha Quartet.

•1994 – *Dies at country home in Staatsburg, New York, July 19*

Wife Tatiana dies 2005. September 10, 2007, their remains are reinterred in Circle of Honour at Central Cemetery in Brno, Tatiana's birthplace.

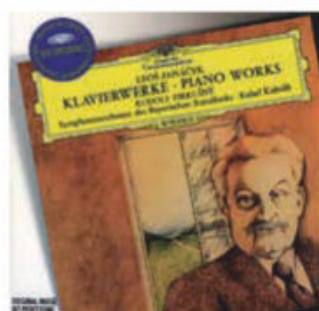


Other obsessions were Smetana's *Czech Dances*, Martinů's solo pieces and Concertos Nos 2, 3 and 4 and Janáček's piano music, to which he brought insights – and revisions – gleaned from the composer himself. He championed Czech classical composers such as Tomášek, Voříšek, Dussek and Benda. Otherwise, Firkušný's repertoire was wide-ranging but discriminating: Haydn and Mozart piano sonatas, 11 Mozart piano concertos, Beethoven's sonatas and last three concertos (he favoured Nos 3 and 5), two Schubert sonatas and the Impromptus (he loved the *Drei Klavierstücke*, D946), Mendelssohn's Concerto No 1, Schumann's Concerto, Fantasia, *Kinderszenen* and *Dauidsbiündlertänze*, Chopin (especially Sonata No 3), Liszt's First Concerto, much Brahms (but rarely the Second Concerto), Franck's Sonata and *Symphonic Variations*, Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Rachmaninov's *Paganini* Rhapsody, Debussy and Ravel.

He made his first records at Abbey Road, London, in 1937–38. Numerologist collectors will be delighted by the numbers of the 10- and 12-inch discs issued by Czech HMV: DA5300 (a Smetana polka and two Suk pieces) and DB5300 (two Smetana Czech dances). A Bach and Chopin disc was overtaken by 'political developments'. It was 11 years before he entered Columbia's 30th Street Studio, New York, to set down a superb Schumann Fantasia. Over five years he recorded works by Mozart, Beethoven, Hanson, Barber, Janáček, beautifully tooled Schubert impromptus and his first Dvořák Concerto (with Szell). Other important sojourns were with Capitol, Vox, DG, RCA, Sugano Disc and Supraphon. Sony Classical has recently released all its Columbia and RCA material as an excellent box-set.

Firkušný would surely not mind being remembered for his Janáček. Three collections were recorded, but the DG set (see left) is the most complete. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'Leoš Janáček - Piano Works'
Rudolf Firkušný *pf*
Members of Bavarian RSO /
Rafael Kubelík
DG (6/72)
This set was recorded in
Munich, in October 1970
and May 1971.

Instrumental



Michelle Assay enters Scriabin's world with Vincenzo Maltempo:

'For the mind-altering Scriabin potion to work, it has to come with a dose of individualism and risk' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 98](#)



Jeremy Nicholas joins Barry Douglas on another Russian adventure:

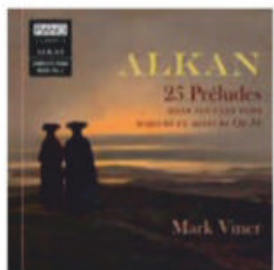
'In the Rachmaninov, Douglas throws caution to the wind, playing with an uninhibited, refulgent ecstasy' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 98](#)

Alkan

Préludes dans tous les tons majeurs et mineurs, Op 31

Mark Viner *pf*

Piano Classics © PCL10189 (59' • DDD)



After the outstanding recording by Paul Wee of Alkan's Symphony and

Concerto for solo piano in the November issue comes another quite exceptional Alkan disc. Mark Viner is engaged in what is intended to be a complete survey of all his piano music. This is the second volume, following his acclaimed recording of the 12 *Études*, Op 35 (1/18).

What a quirky, compelling, unpredictable and endearing set are these *Préludes*. They cover all the major and minor keys, bookended by two in C major, thus are 25 in total (rather than Chopin's 24), arranged in a sequence that rises from C major (No 1) to F minor (No 2), then chromatically: No 3 in D flat major, No 4 in F sharp minor and so on. They were first published in three volumes in 1847. The background to all this, together with Alkan's preface (in which, importantly, he emphasises that the *Préludes* are for piano or organ), their first review (by Fétis) and a detailed commentary on each number are all in the exemplary and scholarly booklet by Viner, a clear successor to one of his mentors, Leslie Howard.

Those unfamiliar with Alkan's Op 31 and expecting the high-flown virtuosity of the Symphony and Concerto, say, will be disappointed. Only in the disconcerting penultimate prelude do we have an illustration of what must have been Alkan's truly staggering keyboard technique manifest in 'a continuous stream of demisemiquavers at a bloodcurdling *prestissimo*' (Viner) and including a mischievous quote from Chopin's Op 10 No 4 en route. For the most part, this is Alkan in subdued, contemplative and (often) experimental mode. Listen to

No 8, the best known of the set, 'The Song of the Madwoman on the Seashore', an unsettling tone poem that, as Viner says, 'can raise eyebrows and inspire awe even in today's jaded and desensitised times'. Several have Hebraic overtones, some beg to have jaunty lyrics attached (Nos 7, 15, 23), No 5 ('Psalm 150': *avec enthousiasme*) has an insistent high F major exclamation ('Laus Deo') above conflicting harmonies below, while No 10's buoyant fugal toccata, joyfully dispatched, lightly pedalled and with perfectly balance voices, makes you want to hear Viner in the Bach Partitas.

I hope that is enough to whet your appetite. This is a superb disc, beautifully recorded, quite outshining Laurent Martin's fine account from 1989, and is another feather in the cap of this remarkable British pianist.

Jeremy Nicholas

Selected comparison:

Martin (4/91) (MARC) 8 223284

JS Bach

Six Keyboard Partitas, BWV825-830

Angela Hewitt *pf*

Hyperion © 2 CDA68271/2 (150' • DDD)



Critics and piano mavens will likely evaluate Angela Hewitt's new 2018

recording of the Bach Partitas alongside her 1996/97 version. The most noticeable difference concerns the piano itself. The earlier recording's Steinway possesses a uniform beauty and warmth that contrasts with the somewhat brighter tone and more pronounced timbral distinctions between registers characterising the pianist's own Fazioli. While Hewitt's stylish integrity, superb finger independence and deep feeling for the music's roots in dance remains a constant, there's now a greater level of interplay between hands, with added variety of articulation and rhythmic flexibility. Compare both Partita No 3

recordings back to back, and you'll immediately notice this. One also perceives more expressive gestures by way of dynamic hairpins, caesuras, breath pauses and myriad accentuations that will strike listeners as either spontaneous or self-aware, depending on personal taste.

I find Partita No 1's faster movements more vibrantly delineated and shapely than before, while the Sarabande has gained welcome breadth and introspection. No question that the new Partita No 2's outer movements hold a decisive dramatic edge over their earlier, relatively studio-bound counterparts. Its Rondeaux remains unusually deliberate, but I prefer the 1996 reading's simpler inflections. In the introduction to Partita No 4's Overture, Hewitt now tempers the rocket-like crescendos she once favoured in the upward scales but the added woodwind-like definition to the fugal section's staccato phrasing compensates: here is where the Fazioli's responsiveness comes into its own. If Hewitt's earlier Allemande evoked a gentle lute solo, the new version unfolds like a vocalise. Conversely, she enlivens the little Aria with playful left-hand jabs and thrusts.

To my ears, Hewitt overthinks No 5's Praeambulum, sectionalising its contrasts, whereas the earlier traversal conveys a more natural flow. Yet her slower Allemande remake boasts a steadier overall pulse and heightened projection of the imitative writing. Her added intensity in the Corrente and Minuetta, again, may account for the immediacy of the Fazioli's note attacks, in contrast to the Steinway's rounder patina. The pianist, however, clearly makes the difference via her more specified handling of the arpeggios in Partita No 6's first-movement introduction and altogether darker fugue. She now keeps the Air on a tight, austere leash and digs deeper into the Sarabande's dissonances while bringing the bass line to the fore. And her deliberation in the final Gigue conveys palpable harmonic



Life-enhancing music: Norie Takahashi and Björn Lehmann bring an infectious joy and spirit to Reger's magnificent piano-duet transcriptions of Bach

tension this time around. As with her *Well-Tempered Clavier* and *Goldberg Variations* remakes (6/09, 11/16), Angela Hewitt's Bach Partitas have not so much changed as evolved. **Jed Distler**

Selected comparison:

Hewitt (6/97) (HYPE) CDA67191/2

JS Bach/Reger

'Transcriptions for Piano Duet'

Six Brandenburg Concertos, BWV1046-1051.

Passacaglia, BWV582. Prelude and Fugue,

'St Anne', BWV552. Toccata and Fugue, BWV565

Piano Duo Takahashi Lehmann

Audite Ⓢ ② AUDITE23 445 (128' • DDD)



Reger's transcriptions for piano duet of the six *Brandenburg*

Concertos date from the early 1900s. They were so well received, so we are told, that they had to be reprinted only two years later. Who was buying them? I can't believe they were intended for musical suburban husbands and wives so they had a bit of Bach to belt out on their Bechstein. The technical demands are well beyond the reach of the average amateur but, like many another duet arrangement, offer a completely new perspective on the originals.

Reger's main preoccupation as a Bach transcriber was, of course, with the organ works and it is his profound knowledge of counterpoint that makes these *Brandenburg* arrangements so successful. Moreover, while a couple of *Brandenburgs* is usually quite enough at one sitting (for this writer, at least), here, once I started I couldn't stop. It's many a long year since I enjoyed this marvellous, life-enhancing set so much. Who knew that Reger could be such fun?

A great deal of this is down to the immaculate pinpoint ensemble of Norie Takahashi and Björn Lehmann and the rhythmic buoyancy of their execution. With properly brisk tempos, the outer movements bubble along with an insatiable *joie de vivre*. They use a minimum of pedal, too, so the complex voicing is always crystal-clear, underpinned by a springy, resonant bass line, while the upper treble, which so often in present-day recordings flies off into a different airier acoustic, here is firmly linked to the lower registers. The piano sound is, to my taste, ideal. All the concertos are recorded on a splendid Yamaha with the exception of No 5. That is played on a Steingraeber in a barely noticeably different acoustic/location.

As far as Reger's organ transcriptions are concerned, Takahashi and Lehmann offer us two works (the ubiquitous Toccata and Fugue in D minor and

the *St Anne* Prelude and Fugue) which Reger also arranged for piano solo, together with his (only) version of the mighty Passacaglia, BWV582. These provide a judicious contrast to the boisterous *Brandenburgs*.

Here, in short, is a pair of discs to return to often. In fact, my one complaint about the whole enterprise is the deathless prose of its prolix booklet. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Beethoven

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 9'

Piano Sonatas - No 7, Op 10 No 3;

No 18, Op 31 No 3; No 32, Op 111

Jonathan Biss *pf*

Orchid Ⓢ ORC100109 (68' • DDD)



Amid the veritable blizzard of Beethoven recordings that has already begun in

anticipation of the 250th anniversary of his birth next year, one project of nine years' duration has culminated. This past June at the Academy of Arts and Letters in upper Manhattan, under the attentive ear and watchful eye of David Frost, one of America's most distinguished record producers, Jonathan Biss recorded the ninth and final volume of his take on the 32 Beethoven piano sonatas.

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

TIRIMO'S BEETHOVEN

Jed Distler is full of admiration for Martino Tirimo's measured and intensely musical approach to Beethoven's complete solo piano works



Fastidious artistry: Martino Tirimo is attentive and communicative in Beethoven

Beethoven

Complete Piano Works

Martino Tirimo *pf*

Hänssler Classic © 16 PH19032 (20h 47' • DDD)

Recorded 2008-18



To the best of my knowledge, Martino Tirimo is the fourth pianist to have recorded Beethoven's complete solo piano music, following in the footsteps of Alfred Brendel, Rudolf Buchbinder and Ronald Brautigam. Tirimo explores this body of work in order of composition (so far as can be ascertained), yet will occasionally stray from chronology to ensure good programming sense. One encounters intriguing juxtapositions, where Beethoven the uncompromising artist gives way to Beethoven the practical populist knocking off a minuet for quick cash. Tirimo's succinct annotations serve as a vivid musical and contextual guide to Beethoven at the piano, from the 12-year-old composer's remarkably assured C minor Variations, WoO63, to his valedictory *Diabelli* Variations and Op 126 Bagatelles.

Tirimo favours expansive tempos that take Beethoven's *allegro* and *presto* directives with a grain of salt.

Consequently, listeners accustomed to the early sonatas transpiring with Schnabel's hurling brio or Richard Goode's dry wit will likely find Tirimo relatively austere by comparison, especially in the scherzos and finales. Yet he justifies and sustains such deliberation in several respects.

For one, Tirimo almost always propels the music forwards by virtue of a sense of rhythm that is solidly centred yet never rigid, helped by an appealing tendency to heighten up-beats at certain junctures. A striking and perhaps extreme example of what I mean can be found in Op 27 No 1's second movement. Here Tirimo's conception of *Allegro molto e vivace* offers a pianistic parallel to Otto Klemperer at his sober extreme: unyieldingly slow, yet devastatingly specific and anything but dogged. This analogy similarly befits Tirimo's handling of the woodwind-like interplay in Op 31 No 3's Scherzo. On the other hand, the pianist holds back in the *Waldstein* Sonata's coda, resulting in a less-than-exuberant pay-off to the patiently unfolding waves of runs and arpeggios that came before. Energy sometimes flags in the *Appassionata*'s concluding pages and in portions of Tirimo's otherwise scorching and stinging *Hammerklavier* fugue (those devastatingly calibrated trills, for example).

Furthermore, Tirimo's scrupulous attention to Beethoven's *subito* dynamics

and unpredictable accents illuminates the intricacies and subtleties of the composer's essentially linear aesthetic, not to mention the pianist's astute voice-leading and crystal-clear textures. Such an approach proves revealing in lesser-known works such as the harmonically surprising C minor *Allegretto* and the 'easy' G major Variations, WoO77 (Tirimo's impeccably matched runs and embellishments). One also should take note of the pianist's assiduous cumulative power and variegated articulation throughout the *Eroica* and *Diabelli* variation sets, the 32 Variations in C minor and the sweeping *Les adieux* Sonata finale.

Tirimo also proves more ambidextrous than many Beethoven practitioners in regard to a strong left-hand presence. Consequently, bass lines emerge in sharper and shapelier profile than usual, which is an asset to the late sonatas. Notice, for example, the uncommon clarity of the rapid, wide-spanning arpeggios in Op 90's first movement, the hushed figurations in Op 110's opening and the powerful polyphonic execution in Op 111's exposition. Like Annie Fischer, Charles Rosen and Freddy Kempf, Tirimo is one of the few pianists to make Beethoven's precise detached and legato articulation directives audible in Op 109's second movement. He also addresses the Op 110 fugue and Op 111's large-scale designs and carefully worked-out tempo relationships with care. The profoundest sonata slow movements may reach their emotional boiling temperature in the manner of Arrau, yet Tirimo's long-lined concentration and sense of proportion are gripping on their own terms.

Comparable thought and consideration extends to pieces that others casually toss off. The nobility and gravitas of Tirimo's C major Polonaise, Op 89, for example, could hardly contrast more with Julius Katchen's upbeat swagger. The plaintive 'Für Elise' becomes a dark lament, while the shorter Bagatelles evolve from quips to monologues.

Collectors seeking a one-pianist solution to the complete Beethoven option may understandably choose Buchbinder's more conventional orthodoxy (Teldec) as the safer bet. However, those who are interested as much in Beethoven's creative process as in the ensuing end results should give Tirimo's fastidious and mindful artistry its due. Hänssler's excellent engineering and the pianist's informative notes add further value to a major recorded achievement. **G**

The first thing to grab you about this release is the selection of sonatas. There's 27-year-old Beethoven, fully conscious and confident of his gifts, pushing the envelope in every direction. Then, just five years later, the master at the top of his game, able to suggest posing a question, pondering it, and walking away with a shrug of the shoulders in the first 14 seconds of a piece, and throwing in for good measure a Scherzo so perfect as to be equalled but not surpassed by the one in the Ninth Symphony. Finally, two decades on, Beethoven's final say in the form that was for him both fecund and personal, coming from an isolating state of deafness that stimulated an exploration of spiritual regions that, two centuries later, continues to inspire awe.

Listening, you're struck by Biss's emotional intelligence, his wit, shrewd judgement and open-hearted communicativeness. No sound, no gesture seems greater than what is absolutely necessary to convey Beethoven's message, naked and unadorned.

The opening *Presto* of the D major Sonata (No 7) is sun-drenched, every gesture bent toward the ebullient portrayal of joyful energy in sound. There's no preparation for the *Largo e mesto*, as though a seasoned tragedian has assumed the stage to deliver a discourse so gripping that its eloquence precludes tears. After this traversal of the abyss, it seems almost astonishing that a Minuet should be given the task of applying a cool cloth to the forehead. The Rondo opens even wider paths toward the light, singing of rebirth and renewal.

Biss's E flat Sonata (No 18) is funny without being coy. The extended runs of the first movement, on which so much of the drollery depends, are delivered with a straight face, while the jocundly boisterous Scherzo remains proportionate, if not, strictly speaking, polite. The finale leaves you wondering why no choreographer has taken up the work.

It's difficult to pin down precisely all the elements that contribute to making Biss's Op 111 so powerful. The implacable seriousness of the first movement is achieved more through its portrayal of perplexing conundrum than any evocation of brutal force. Biss's habitation of every note in the Arietta creates the sense of a journey in the higher regions; when catharsis is achieved it seems tantamount to a spiritual cleansing, the attainment of a state of grace.

Rarely are hand, mind and heart united as you'll hear them here. I suspect that, after all is said and done with the

anniversary celebrations a year or so from now, these performances will sound as individual and deeply satisfying as they do now. **Patrick Rucker**

Brahms

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 5. Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op 35

Nelson Goerner *pf*

Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA557 (57' • DDD)



Given the warm reception accorded his 2009 Brahms B flat Concerto with Tadaaki Otaka and the NHK SO (7/18), it is perhaps surprising that Nelson Goerner has waited so long to record some of the solo music. Never a pianist to do things by half measures, he's chosen arguably two of the most formidable works from Brahms's relatively circumscribed solo oeuvre.

If ever there were a piano sonata with a symphony lurking inside, it is the Brahms F minor. To Goerner's immense credit, he doesn't detonate the instrument in an effort to accommodate the occasionally overblown writing but has mastered its details so thoroughly that, for all the breadth and heft of the musical ideas, the piece sounds proportionate to the piano.

The opening *Allegro maestoso* unfolds almost exclusively in chords – straight, arpeggiated, broken, embellished. Whether robust or quiet, Goerner gives them shape by sensitive voicing and unwavering attention to the larger phrase contours. Heroic and lyric passages are vividly contrasted, and Brahms's plentiful expressive and agogic annotations scrupulously observed. Yet the signal moments in Goerner's reading occur in the chaste *Andante espressivo*. Rather than yielding to the temptations of heaven-storming youthful ardour early on, he lets Brahms's relatively thin textures speak with beguiling simplicity. This aura of touching tenderness allows space for amplification and expansion without overplaying in the movement's passionate yet contained conclusion. Following an animated Scherzo and atmospheric Intermezzo, Goerner brings the finale's diffuse elements into a cohesive, satisfying whole.

In Goerner's hands the *Paganini* Variations, Brahms's tribute to the virtuosity of his friend Carl Tausig, becomes an exploration of the piano's expressive and sonorous potential. In Book 1 the treacherous right-hand

octave glissandos of Var 13 are tossed off without ostentation, while the dazzling Var 14 fairly dances with delight. In Book 2, Var 8 brings to mind a *danseur noble* nonchalantly demonstrating the perfection of his *fouettés*. The quieter variations, such as Vars 12 and 13, exude intimacy and mystery. Perhaps the highest praise is that, far from being the arduous progress through an obstacle course that the Variations often seem, this performance is a seamless traversal of variegated terrain, effortlessly accomplished, emerging finally as a showcase for artistic finesse rather than technical display.

My sole reservation is a technical one: at times microphone placement seems unnecessarily close to the instrument. That said, this F minor Sonata is magisterial in purview and distinctive in its compelling musicality. I suspect that, with time, the *Paganini* Variations will take their place beside the best of them, Petri's (APR, 12/15) and Richter's (Decca) included.

Patrick Rucker

Enescu

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 24 No 3. Suite, Op 18

Saskia Giorgini *pf*

Piano Classics Ⓢ PCL10184 (57' • DDD)



Unlike his first two suites for piano, Enescu's Op 18 is essentially a collection of individual, unrelated pieces brought together under one roof. Yet what incredible pieces they are! 'Voix de la steppe' beautifully exemplifies Enescu's 'speech-singing' style, while 'Mazurk mélancolique' commences with Chopinesque gestures that morph into exotically mobile creatures. The petulant grotesqueries throughout the 'Burlesque' can be described as Bartók with added calories, the 'Chorale' haunts you with its alluring modal sleights of hand and the concluding 'Carillon nocturne' predates Messiaen's stained-glass chime chords and ringing resonances by several decades.

Saskia Giorgini's idiomatic virtuosity is completely at one with Enescu's sound world. She is more headlong and direct in the 'Appassionato' next to Josu De Solaun's comparably rhetorical approach (Grand Piano). While De Solaun's subtle rubato unquestionably befits 'Voix de la steppe', Giorgini's stricter metrics and stronger linear differentiation create a more colourful impact.

Enescu's Third Piano Sonata defines 'neoclassical bittersweetness',

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notwithstanding the incisive extroversion of Dinu Lipatti's historic broadcast recording (EMI/Warner), and Nicola Meecham's similarly conceived interpretation that, of course, benefits from modern sound (Somm). By holding the first-movement *Vivace con brio* ever-so-slightly back, Giorgini secures steadier rhythm throughout and conveys greater differentiation between detached and sustained passages. She keeps the long *Andantino cantabile* hauntingly afloat as she contours the music's melodic, accompanimental and purely decorative elements in three-dimensional perspective. The same can be said regarding the *Allegro con spirito*'s conversational counterpoint and appropriately muted left-hand repeated-note ostinatos; here is where the Bösendorfer's 'fortepiano in the body of a concert grand' timbre particularly speaks. In short, Giorgini has truly internalised this elusive, oddly gripping music, whetting the appetite for an eventual Enescu cycle. Recommended.

Jed Distler

Suite, Op 18 – selected comparison:

De Solaun (GRAN) GP705, GP751X

Sonata No 3 – selected comparisons:

Meecham (1/09) (SOMM) SOMMCD081

Lipatti (EMI/WARN) 207318-2

Liszt

'Between Heaven & Hell'

Piano Sonata, S178. Après une lecture du Dante, S161 No 7. Csárdás obstinée, S225 No 2. Deux Légendes, S175

Joseph Moog *pf*

Onyx © ONYX4195 (64' • DDD)



Joseph Moog has one of those techniques that most pianists only dream

about. His passagework fairly shimmers with prodigious effortlessness and his octaves are nothing short of dazzling. His *fortissimo* is mighty, his *pianissimo* hushed yet resonant.

On a purely technical level, Moog's interpretation of Liszt's B minor Sonata, a work that poses rigours for pianists comparable to the challenges of the role of Hamlet for actors, is bound to amaze. Doubtless some pianophile, stopwatch in hand, will clock Moog's octaves as faster than the 1932 Horowitz recording. However, for elucidation of the Sonata's deeper musical values – its organic structure, the inventive permutations of thematic material, the sustained aura of ambivalence previously

unknown in music – it's probably best to look elsewhere.

Bluntly put, Moog seems incapable of curbing his mania for speed. He achieves moments approaching poetic eloquence, only to dash them to bits with obtrusively frenetic passagework of such velocity that the ear is scarcely able to follow. His habitual pendulum-swing between slow and very, very fast renders the inherent harmonic tensions of the score moot. The *Quasi adagio* becomes untethered from a basic underlying pulse, wandering aimlessly. Somnolence is dispelled by the rude fugato, its hectic progress marked with insensate clatter that grows so numbingly relentless that, by the time the lofty peroration and mysterious denouement arrive, one is past caring.

Liszt reversed the *Sonata quasi una fantasia* appellation Beethoven used for his Op 27 Sonatas to *Fantasia quasi sonata* as the subtitle of the *Dante Sonata*, emphasising the fantasy elements of the work. In a piece replete with rhetorical devices borrowed from Italian opera, Moog seems all but impervious to the contours of declamation, the phrase shapes, caesuras and emphases on which the work depends. The result is a vague series of tableaux, areas of technical focus that, in and of themselves, convey little meaning, cohesion or sense of fantasy.

In the second of the two *Légendes*, it sounds as though St Francis of Paola exercised poor judgement in crossing the straits of Messina during a raging cyclone. Meanwhile, back in Hungary, it was clearly an off-night at the csárda, or roadside inn, with revellers coming to a virtual full stop six times before accelerating in tedious predictability during the 336 bars of *Csárdás obstinée*. **Patrick Rucker**

Prokofiev

Piano Sonata No 6, Op 82. Four Études, Op 2. Tales of an Old Grandmother, Op 31. Visions fugitives, Op 22

Florian Noack *pf*

La Dolce Volta © LDV74 (72' • DDD)



I first became acquainted with Florian Noack's gifts for lyricism

and sensitivity through several Lyapunov discs released by ARS Produktion (3/14, 10/16). These qualities reveal themselves in Prokofiev's second Op 2 Étude, where Noack's yielding legato touch markedly contrasts with Matti Raekallio's scintillating *détaché* articulation.

Noack's navigation of Étude No 3's daunting double notes is fuller-bodied and heavier in gait next to Raekallio's brisker, supplier delivery. On the other hand, Noack brings a wide scope of tone colour and characterful contrast to the four pieces encompassing *Tales of an Old Grandmother*, Op 31. To hear what I mean, sample the third selection, where, at the outset, Noack proudly intones the zig-zagging melody over the staccato left-hand chords, and later infuses each of the rising chromatic phrases midway with its own hue.

Noack's detailed moderation in the faster, more overtly virtuoso of the *Visions fugitives* differs from the litheness and transparency of Steven Osborne's Hyperion versions. No 4, for example, is hardly *animato*, yet Prokofiev's imitative writing that jumps from register to register acquires an unprecedented dark humour. Similarly, No 5's playful *giocoso* patterns take on a newfound balletic and conversational character. Noack plays the stark No 16 twice as slow as either Osborne or Olli Mustonen, and, in the process, wrings more tension from the dissonant clashes.

Listeners accustomed to Sviatoslav Richter's steely forthrightness in the first movement of Prokofiev's Sixth Sonata may find Noack relatively lightweight. They will change their minds once they zero in on Noack's subtle modifications of tempo and his ability to make the sweeping passagework and big chordal *tuttis* resonate with little recourse to the sustain pedal. The *Allegretto*'s outer sections stand out for Noack's marvellous woodwind-like articulation of the *détaché* chords. Both Noack and Richter unfold the *Lentissimo* third movement with hypnotic breadth, but the waltz rhythm emerges more clearly under Richter. Other pianists create more of a whirlwind in the finale, yet there's something to be said for the refinement informing Noack's carefully calibrated voicings: even the glissandos are controlled to a T. If you responded well to Pogorelich's similar vantage point in this movement, you'll like Noack. La Dolce Volta's deluxe sonic and packaging values illustrate why it's still worthwhile collecting CDs.

Jed Distler

Four Études – selected comparisons:

Raekallio (ONDI) ODE898-2

Visions fugitives – selected comparisons:

Mustonen (5/96) (DECC) ➔ 444 803-2DH

Osborne (3/13) (HYPE) CDA67896

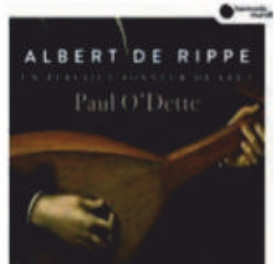
Piano Sonata No 6 – selected comparison:

Richter (DECC) 480 8745

Rippe

'Un parfait sonneur de leut'

Festa O passi sparsi **Gentian** L'eccho **Janequin** Martin menoit. Or vien ça vien mamie Perrette
Rippe Fantasies – No 1, 'de Guyterne'; No 2; No 2, 'de Guyterne'; No 3; No 5; No 8; No 9; No 19; No 22. Gaillarde, 'La Milanoise'. Gaillarde piemontoise. Galliarde. Pavane. Pavane, 'La Romanesque'. La Seraphine **Sandrin** Douce mémoire **Sermisy** On en dira ce qu'on voudra
Paul O'Dette *lute*
 Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2275 (76' • DDD)



The Italian Renaissance lutenist/composer Albert de Rippe's

playing may or may not have had the power, as was said, to soften his own kidney stones. But this recital devoted to de Rippe's lute music and performed by that modern-day Orpheus of the lute, Paul O'Dette, is certain to soften the hardest of hearts.

Like his contemporary Francesco da Milano, 'Il Divino' – whose lute music O'Dette has also recorded (7/13) – de Rippe (c1500-1551), for much of his career in the employ of François I, appears to have enchanted poets and potentates alike. Again, it's easy to hear why. As O'Dette writes in a booklet note: 'Albert de Rippe's music is remarkable both for the quality and expressivity of his compositions, but also for the techniques he used to produce full, rich sonorities and to expand the colour palette of the lute.'

Where many lutenist/composers of the time might, for example, have been largely content with a transparent three-part texture, de Rippe's fulsome harmonies and sonorous arpeggiations evoke the majesty of a choir or organ. Yet suggestion and subtlety abound in de Rippe's fantasias in particular, but also in his intabulations of popular chansons. O'Dette includes some pavaues and galliards most likely by de Rippe's student, Guillaume Morlaye.

If the opening Fantasia No 19 exudes a certain jouissance, especially under O'Dette's eternally lithe fingers, he positively savours the melodic conversations and fuliginous harmonies unfurling in Fantasia No 2. O'Dette likewise dispatches the elaborations on Sandrin's *Douce mémoire* and the measured sighs of the Pavane (track 17) in the same manner we have come to expect from this fine musician.

William Yeoman

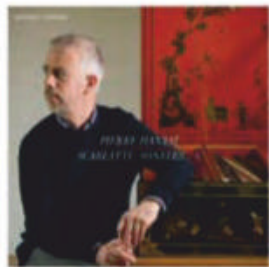
D Scarlatti

'Sonatas, Vol 6'

Keyboard Sonatas – Kk6; Kk18; Kk43; Kk69; Kk119; Kk161; Kk170; Kk179; Kk234; Kk273; Kk384; Kk477; Kk487; Kk501; Kk502; Kk544; Kk550

Pierre Hantaï *hpd*

Mirare © MIR422 (78' • DDD)



Who could complain that Pierre Hantaï is taking his time to roam among

Scarlatti's sonatas – 26 years after the appearance of his first Scarlatti disc for Astrée Auvidis (4/93), this (Vol 6 of the Mirare series) is still only the seventh – when by doing so he allows us to savour each one, to feel that each new disc is an individually curated gift to us? Perhaps only three of the 17 sonatas included here are at all widely known: Kk119, with its acrobatic leaps, almost like a circus act complete with 'ta-das' and 'allez-oops'; the proud-gestured Kk6; and Kk18, with its frothing *presto* semiquavers. But naturally there are plenty of other gems to discover. The lilting dance measures, fizzing rockets and dazzling octaves of Kk43 – Scarlatti at his most brilliant – suggest some wild choreographic fantasy; Kk69 has a smoothly coordinated spider-like crawl similar to the better-known Kk87; the capricious Kk273 whirs gently like a mechanical toy before springing off into swirling scales, plunging arpeggios and then a harmonically dense gigue; and Kk487 opens with the massive, attention-grabbing chords and textural contrasts of an orchestral overture. There's so much more – there always is in Scarlatti – but there simply isn't room here to describe it all.

Hantaï never makes the mistake of tearing into these pieces and wrestling them. If the music itself seems to approach organised chaos in places, his playing is always controlled, seeking out lyricism and humanity, no matter how fast the notes fly. And when Scarlatti explicitly sings his soul, so does Hantaï, for instance in the tenderly spun *affettuoso* of Kk384. He can do all this because of a superb technique that puts him in command of all the virtuoso fireworks but also enables him to let every note speak eloquently with perfect placement and tone. It really is playing of the highest order.

When Hantaï started recording Scarlatti in 1993 he tended to get overlooked in favour of the spectacularly virtuoso but harder-fingered Andreas Staier. But now, with every superb new release, the

Frenchman is laying further claim to a position as perhaps the best Scarlatti harpsichordist of all. **Lindsay Kemp**

Schubert

'Last Piano Sonatas'

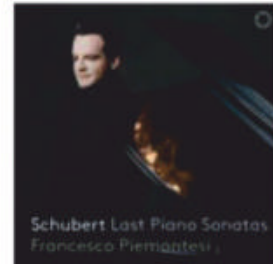
Piano Sonatas – No 19, D958;

No 20, D959; No 21, D960^a

Francesco Piemontesi *pf*

Pentatone © PTC5186 742 (117' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Salle de Musique, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, February 14, 2018



Francesco Piemontesi presents here Schubert's last three sonatas, all

recorded in February 2018 in the same Swiss venue, though the B flat is live, whereas the C minor and A major are not. There's such a consistency of sound and approach that the applause at the end of the last sonata comes as something of a shock.

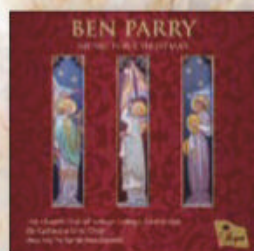
Piemontesi is an artist who very much puts the music first and the abiding sense of these readings is their naturalness. There's no lack of imagination either – for instance in the contrast between the driving first idea and the gentler second subject in the first movement of the C minor (D958), while in the exposition repeat he subtly varies colours and dynamics. Some may find his development section a little underpowered but in its place there's a sense of musical finesse. He paces the slow movement sensibly, lending it a hymnic quality without dragging, though some find a more haloed beauty of sound here, not least Uchida and Andsnes. And the Menuetto has a straightforward air, with a nicely soothing Trio, whereas Paul Lewis is altogether more quizzical. Piemontesi's finale is slightly on the steady side for my taste, a little lacking in desperation – certainly compared to Uchida, who emphasises the sense of imminent catastrophe to wonderful effect.

Those qualities inform the A major Sonata (D959) too, and while Piemontesi's playing is always classically classy, I sometimes hungered for more drama. Andsnes bring a greater sense of contrast between the fraught chordal opening and the almost playful response. And no one can rival Uchida for sheer range of colours, alongside whom Piemontesi is just a little pale. But he does come to life in the development, which is imbued with drive and fire, and again his sense of detail is very telling. In D959's



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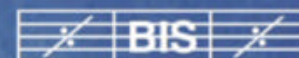
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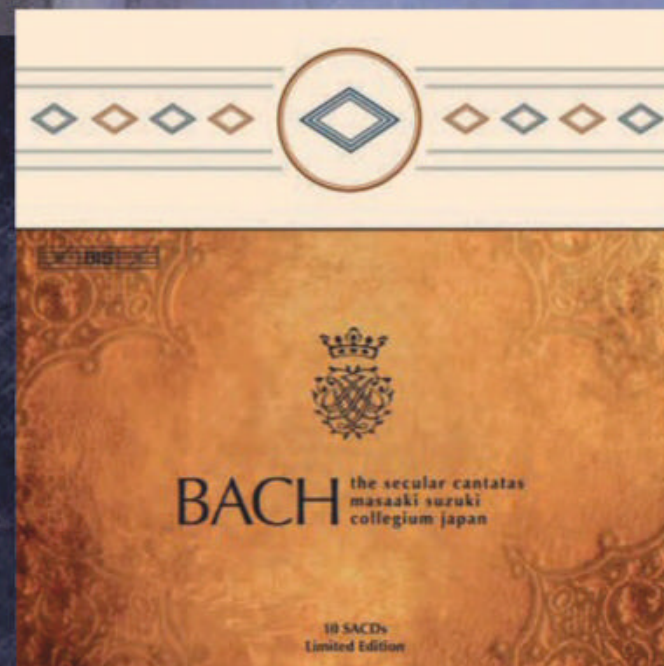
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second movement again, his pacing is just so, but the infamous ‘nervous breakdown’ passage is a little too studied and reined-in. The Scherzo, on the other hand, is a highlight of the disc, nicely airborne, contrasting vividly with the sudden incursions to the bass register, and as he leads off into the finale you’re confident you’re in the safest of hands – for Piemontesi is a master when it comes to traversing Schubert’s epic plains.

That quality of pacing also informs the B flat Sonata (D960) and the word ‘naturalness’ again comes to mind. Piemontesi is at the furthest possible remove from Buniatishvili’s breathlessly reactive reading. As the music dips into the minor he conveys its agitation but again without exaggeration, and the exposition repeat is full of little variants, easing into the development with subtlety. That informs the rest of the sonata, with the contrasting elements from which Schubert builds the slow movement well judged, the dotted figure casting an ominous note but not overstated, and he’s alive to the way the composer re-colours phrases through harmonic shifts. Personally, I like the Scherzo a little more flighty than here, as witness Uchida, though Zimerman is equally fascinating in the way he ties Scherzo and Trio together.

Piemontesi’s finale is always purposeful, with a relatively brisk tempo (far better this than one that drags), and he fully incorporates the bare octave into the narrative, rather than letting it bring matters to a halt. In sum, a set that impresses for its finesse, though for me Piemontesi doesn’t quite plumb the depths of the greatest accounts.

Harriet Smith

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Uchida (9/98^R) (DECC) 475 6282PB8

Andsnes (8/02^R, 4/05^R, 7/07^R) (EMI/WARN) 516448-2

Lewis (5/03^R, 7/14) (HARM) HMC90 2165/6

D959 & 960 – selected comparison:

Zimerman (10/17) (DG) 479 7588GH

D960 – selected comparisons:

Pires (5/13) (DG) 477 8107GH

Buniatishvili (6/19) (SONY) 19075 84120-2

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Vincenzo Maltempo *pf*

Piano Classics Ⓢ ② PCL10168 (134’ • DDD)



‘Be careful with Scriabin’s music; don’t go too far or you might end up

losing your sanity.’ So a teacher once warned me. On the other hand, don’t go far enough and you’ll have no real Scriabin experience at all. Certainly the psychedelic journey through the 10 piano sonatas deserves a trigger warning or two. So I fastened my seatbelt and prepared to be whisked away on a magical mystery tour by Vincenzo Maltempo. Alas, it never really took off. Maltempo has an excellent command of the instrument and is responsive to the multi-dimensional texture and complex harmonies of the music. But for the mind-altering Scriabin potion to work, it has to come with a higher dose of individualism and risk.

Already with the early sonatas it’s clear that Maltempo is no match for existing recordings. The upheavals and protests of No 1, for instance, have far greater dramatic charge in Norma Fisher’s BBC recording, and Maltempo’s caution in the funeral-march finale pales before the earth-shattering Lazar Berman. The Second Sonata’s volatile poetry finds more perceptive advocates in Yevgeny Sudbin (BIS, 12/07) and Håkon Austbø. Austbø’s Fourth is also far more playful and flirtatious in the first movement, leading to a true ‘flight of liberation’ towards the ‘flamboyant sun of triumph’, as Scriabin put it. Despite his considerable élan at the start of the *Prestissimo volando*, Maltempo doesn’t approach the ecstasy and abundance that come naturally to Gilels, Sofronitsky and, more recently, Hamelin.

The competition when it comes to the mature Scriabin is no less fierce. First there are uneclipsable accounts such as Richter’s Icarus-flight (without the crash-and-burn) in No 5 or Horowitz’s hair-raising exaltation in Nos 9 and 10 (Sony, 5/15). In all of these Maltempo is stylish and reliable but never prepared to court danger. In their complete sets, Ashkenazy and Austbø display a richer palette of colours, while Hamelin’s intensity is electric. The sorceries of the Sixth and Seventh Sonatas and the comparatively less played and musically ferocious Eighth are the real bonus of complete sets such as these. Maltempo’s survey has the advantage of presenting the sonatas in order (unlike Austbø’s), taking us from personal late-Romantic outburst to dissolution and unification with the cosmos. Also in Maltempo’s favour is a piano sound that is a good deal more pleasant than the over-projected Ashkenazy. The main problem is that if you already have the Scriabin fever, you will probably feel frustrated,

whereas if you come from a position of scepticism it’s highly unlikely that you’ll be converted. **Michelle Assay**

Piano Sonatas – selected comparisons:

Ashkenazy (9/78^R, 7/81^R, 10/87^R) (DECC) 452 961-2DF2

Austbø (5/90) (SIMA) PSC1055/6 (oas)

Hamelin (6/96) (HYPE) CDA67131/2

Sonata No 1 – selected comparisons:

N Fisher (7/18) (SONE) SONCLA003

Berman (MUSI) CD4865

Tchaikovsky • Rachmaninov

‘Tchaikovsky Plus One, Vol 2’

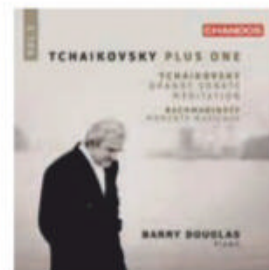
Rachmaninov Moments musicaux, Op 16

Tchaikovsky Grande Sonate, Op 37.

Méditation, Op 72 No 5

Barry Douglas *pf*

Chandos Ⓢ CHAN20121 (68’ • DDD)



Barry Douglas continues his ‘personal salute ... to great masterworks of the Russian repertoire’ after a first volume that paired Tchaikovsky’s *The Seasons* with Mussorgsky’s *Pictures* (12/18).

Whether Tchaikovsky’s *Grande Sonate* is a masterwork must remain a moot point, various critics describing it as ‘problematic’, ‘flawed’ and ‘middle-inspiration Tchaikovsky’. Douglas gives us a full-blooded reading *con amore* while adopting a less robust view of the first movement than Richter’s celebrated recording which, like Joseph Moog’s more recent account (Onyx, A/14), takes the *moderato* part of the prescribed *moderato e risoluto* to its fastest extreme. Douglas makes a powerful case for something in between these two and the more deliberate Cherkassky (live in 1982) and Viktoria Postnikova (Erato). The succeeding three movements are more in agreement with Richter than with Moog’s consistently brisker speeds. The latter has a further advantage in Onyx’s more immediate, focused sound engineering, superior to Richter’s and, for me, preferable to the less intimate placing of Douglas’s instrument in the acoustic of Cedars Hall at Wells Cathedral School. The toccata-like passagework of the finale in Moog’s hands is notably crisper and more articulated.

Douglas follows this with the brief (5’30”) ‘Méditation’ from the late *Dix-huit Morceaux*, initially providing a soothing contrast to the bombastic sonata before reverting at its climax to more Tchaikovskian angst and despair.



Eloquent virtuosity: Pierre Hantaï continues his triumphant exploration of Scarlatti – see review on page 96

In Rachmaninov's *Moments musicaux*, absolute clarity of texture is of secondary consideration in the three fast numbers (Nos 2, 4 and 6). In these – and especially among the torrential demisemiquavers and triple/quadruple *forte* markings of the latter – Douglas throws caution to the wind, playing with an uninhibited, refulgent ecstasy that I found profoundly moving. At the centre of the set is the B minor *Moment*, which is moving for a different reason, as melancholic and brooding as anything Tchaikovsky wrote, and beautifully played.

Jeremy Nicholas

'Pictures & Songs'

Gershwin Three Preludes Mussorgsky

Pictures at an Exhibition **Rachmaninov/Wild** *Dreams*, Op 38 No 5. *Floods of Spring*, Op 14 No 11. *In the Silent Night*, Op 4 No 3. *The Little Island*, Op 14 No 2. *Where Beauty Dwells*, Op 21 No 7 **Wild** *Virtuoso Études* on Gershwin *Songs* – No 3, *The Man I love*; No 4, *Embraceable you*; No 7, *Fascinatin' rhythm*

Benjamin Moser *pf*

AVI-Music © AVI8553918 (64' • DDD)



Benjamin Moser, born in Munich in 1981, serial competition entrant (fifth prize at the 2007 Tchaikovsky), student of Dmitri Bashkirov and Alfred Brendel, has kept a low profile thus far in his career. This rather odd programme stems from his desire to mark 'the 10th anniversary of my prize at the Tchaikovsky Competition' with a volume of Russian repertoire, pairing *Pictures at an Exhibition* with Rachmaninov's First Sonata. He then discovered Earl Wild's transcriptions and had second thoughts.

The Mussorgsky is played using the original version – which means several small but significant differences from the more familiar Rimsky-Korsakov edition: 'Bydło' starting *ff* instead of *pp* with a *poco a poco crescendo*, for example; 'Goldenberg und Schmuyle' ending with two unison B flats instead of Rimsky's unison C

and B flat. Moser's is an unflashy performance with a tendency to pull back at the end of phrases; but it is one that, having been more concerned with pianistic textures than storytelling in the early movements, gradually gains in characterisation as it proceeds.

The three Gershwin Preludes lead to three Gershwin songs in their super-virtuoso guise. These are difficult to bring off and Moser, fine pianist that he is, cannot quite exchange his well-trained German upbringing for twinkle-toed Broadway. Best of all are the five Rachmaninov song transcriptions – what stunning examples of the transcriber's art they are! – in which Moser seems, at last, to relax and soar. 'Floods of Spring', taken at a more measured pace than its creator's benchmark recording, is a sustained 4'27" of pianistic rapture, though I cannot understand why Moser cuts the entire middle section of 'The Little Island', surely the most impassioned of Wild's set and which one day, surely, someone will arrange for piano and orchestra.

Jeremy Nicholas

Erkki-Sven Tüür

The word 'energy' frequently recurs in Andrew Mellor's profile of the Estonian whose recent work asks big questions

When discussing the music of Erkki-Sven Tüür, it's worth starting with geography. The composer lives on an island, surrounded by the cool waters of the Baltic (more on which later). Hiiumaa may be 22km from the mainland but it belongs to Estonia, a country strongly influenced by Finland and Russia to the north and east, yet tightly bound to those southern Baltic siblings with which it famously sang its way to independence from the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

That seismic shift in Estonia's existence came only a few years after Tüür's breakthrough piece, *Insula deserta* ('Forgotten island', 1989), first performed in 1989 by the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra up on Finland's west coast. The piece has a terse beauty taken forward in *Passion* and *Illusion* (both 1993) and to some extent in *The Wanderer's Evening Song* (2001), which vibrates with fervour characteristic of the Baltic choral tradition. These three later works, like the music of Tüür's compatriot Arvo Pärt, speak of a nation coming to terms with its new-found freedom – looking to wipe the slate clean but doing so with cautious optimism and an acknowledgement that scars remain. When the MS *Estonia* sank in the Baltic in 1994 it looked momentarily like the country might spiral into a vortex of lost confidence: life without a superpower in charge had suddenly become real.

His central preoccupation is a celebration and manipulation of energy in its many forms – a compulsion to seize the moment

In truth, the pain still lingers in revitalised, laudable Estonia and in so much of its exceptional and heartfelt music (not just classical). It is there in Tüür's works even if his central preoccupation has become a celebration and manipulation of energy in its many forms – a compulsion to seize the moment. The overriding power of Pärt's music helped lead Tüür into composing following his flute and percussion studies. But he was just as interested in the bands King Crimson and Yes, and the pulsating rhythms of John Adams and Mike Oldfield.

Those interests pushed him into the only really viable action for a post-adolescent in Estonia: starting a band. For four years until 1983, Tüür was flautist, keyboardist, vocalist and writer in In Spe, the group that would become known as the godfather of Estonian prog-rock and which sneaked past the Soviet censors with its largely instrumental albums. There was an etched, patient quality to the 'chamber rock' the band produced with Tüür on Moog synthesisers and his wife, Anne,



on piano and guitar. *Illuminatio* from an album recorded in 1982 foreshadows the composer's viola concerto of the same name (2008) in its patient journey, and clearly owes something to Estonian folk music (when Tüür left the band in 1983, he was replaced by the young Alo Mattiisen, who went on to arrange some of the most significant anthems of the Singing Revolution).

But In Spe could not contain the many musics swirling around Tüür's head: yes, rock and minimalism, but also Gregorian chant, polyphony, microtonality and 12-note serialism. By way of release, the composer exploited those different worlds for their contrasts, and a series of polystylistic scores followed that juxtaposed supposedly incompatible ideas and styles. *Architectonics VI* (1992), written for members of the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra in Finland and one chapter in the longstanding series of the same name, has a string quartet busying itself with a tight, four-voiced conversation that slips and slides through adjacent notes while wind instruments and a vibraphone play a note row; from the two elements, a third emerges. In another example, the industry of the string group in *Symphony No 3* (1997) is incited by numerous interrupting voices that spring forth as if from another world.

While Tüür's music was clearly mining energy in such contrasts, the composer soon started to explore how he might do so within a more specific and personal framework. Around the turn of the century, he started to develop a method whereby an entire work would be 'encapsulated in a source code – a gene, which, as it mutates and grows, connects the dots in the fabric of the whole work'. This 'vectorial' technique used intervals (determined by number sequences) which then controlled the direction of a piece with specific references to voice-leading and the score's various structural arcs.

As in equivalent serial or delimiting techniques, the effect was in fact to make Tüür's music more free and



TÜÜR FACTS

Born October 16, 1959, in Kärdla, Hiiumaa, Estonia
Studied Flute and percussion at Georg Ots Music High School, Tallinn (1976-80), and composition with Jaan Rääts at the Estonian Academy of Music (also Tallinn; 1980-84) and privately with Lepo Sumera

Awarded Estonian Music Prize (1987, 1988); Great Bear Prize (1996, 1997); Culture Prize of the Republic of Estonia (1997); Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature, the Arts and Science (1998); Annual Prize of the Estonian Music Council (2003) and a second Culture Prize of the Republic of Estonia (2014) for *Peregrinus ecstaticus*

Artistic Director International contemporary music festival NYJD in Tallinn, 1991-2011

Key quote 'My pieces are abstract dramas in sound, with characters and an extremely dynamic chain of events; they unfold in a space that is constantly shifting, expanding and contracting'

improvisatory – just as hitting golf balls in a driving range loosens up a player's swing.

When a grid is established, intuition can reign. This became the key to Tüür's mature style, the next chapter of the composer's polystylistic method, 'the endpoint of a journey that began as a search for balance between the individual and the universal' (according to Tüür's Estonian colleague Kerri Kotta). The first steps on the vectorial journey were taken with *Oxymoron* (2003), a search for harmonic unity within the oxymoron of combining vertical and horizontal activity.

What emerged from the development was the distinctive energy that gives so many of Tüür's scores the feeling of huge swirling structures, and that took Estonian music into a new and wholly optimistic era. 'My work as a composer is entirely concerned with the relationship between emotional and intellectual energy and the ways in which they can be channelled, accumulated, dissipated and re-accumulated,' the composer writes on his website. Which doesn't stop each work sounding distinctive. To date there are nine symphonies, 11 concertos, works for string orchestra and chamber ensemble and an opera (*Wallenberg*, 2001) on the subject of Raoul Wallenberg, the Swede who saved thousands of Jews during the Second World War. Almost all have been recorded, some more than once. Recent developments include a tendency to anchor big orchestral scores firmly from below (Symphony No 8, 2010), which might reflect the influence of Finland (the nearest landmass to the north of Hiiumaa) and particularly of Tüür's friend Magnus Lindberg.

Not unrelated to that influence, the principle of 'energy conversion' in Tüür's works has been outlined by Kotta – that is, how a passage might combine a decelerating rhythm with accelerating dynamics, giving the impression of an energy field transferring from the former to the latter.

The process is in evidence in the later symphonies, but some of the more recent concertos have apparently glanced back to the idea of material contrast. The clarinet concerto *Peregrinus ecstaticus* (2012) juxtaposes two groups of material that generate a controlling force field between them. Tüür's organic and dynamic use of texture in this piece, particularly his conjuring of low sounds and control of the resulting energy, is extraordinary. The consistently stimulating and beautiful viola concerto *Illuminatio* sees the solo instrument manipulating the orchestra from above (or, at least, from the middle) as if the ensemble is a giant marionette. Dazzling, tight constellations emerge above in high trumpets, woodwind and strings.

If you're tempted to read bigger metaphors into gestures like those, fine. Tüür writes, 'One of my goals is to reach the creative energy of the listener. Music as an abstract form of art is able to create different visions for each of us.'

One of his most recent works provides a more specific image. The piccolo concerto *Solastalgia* (2016), written for Vincent Cortvrint and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, bears a particularly strong relationship to the island of Hiiumaa and asks the biggest existential question of our times: how long can such an island remain? 'Winters are no longer winters and summers no longer summers,' Tüür said of life on the island at the time of writing the score. The big, broad piece casts the solo instrument as a tiny creature whose smallest gesture can have seismic effects. But gradually, it loses its voice. **G**

ENERGY AND CONTRASTS ON DISC

Showcasing some of Tüür's choral and orchestral works

**'Flux'**

David Geringas *vc* Vienna RSO / Dennis Russell Davies
 ECM New Series (1/00)

Tüür's Symphony No 3 adumbrates his early style, in which the music strains thrillingly in the face of two contrasting elements and a third emerges from the process. This excellent recording also includes the Cello Concerto and one of the composer's most iconic works, the unmistakably Baltic *Lighthouse*.

**'Awakening'**

Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, Sinfonietta Riga / Daniel Reuss
 Ondine (2/12)

Tüür's 'awakening to the light' written for Tallinn's year as European Capital of Culture in 2011 is a work that pivots, and magically so, on the transmutation of textures – in this case bringing human voices into the orchestral mix. *Awakening* is a radiant and uplifting work, and the fillers (*The Wanderer's Evening Song* and *Insula deserta*) are valuable too.

**Illuminatio. Symphony No 8.****Whistles and Whispers from Uluru**

Genevieve Lacey *recs* Lawrence Power *va*
 Marko Myöhänen *elec* Tapiola Sinfonietta / Olari Elts
 Ondine (5/18)

The viola concerto *Illuminatio* is one of Tüür's most compelling recent creations, a journey towards a light source that eventually washes out the sound altogether, making it a fascinating counterweight to that most famous of Baltic concertos, Pēteris Vasks's *Distant Light*. The concerto gets an exquisite performance from Lawrence Power here and the disc also includes the mesmerising recorder concerto *Whistles and Whispers from Uluru*.

Vocal



Richard Wigmore hears two vocally outstanding Farinelli albums:

'Here and elsewhere Bartoli mines the expressive and dramatic potential of the Italian language with unique intensity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 112**



Edward Seckerson enjoys a tribute to Vienna from Jonas Kaufmann:

'There is so much to savour here, but above all it's the stylistic understanding that carries all before it' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 113**

Berlioz

La damnation de Faust, Op 24

Verónica Silva *sop* **Joyce DiDonato** *mez*

Michael Spyres *ten* **Alexandre Duhamel** *bar*

Nicolas Courjal *bass* **Gulbenkian Chorus**;

Les Petits Chanteurs de Strasbourg; **Strasbourg**

Philharmonic Orchestra / **John Nelson**

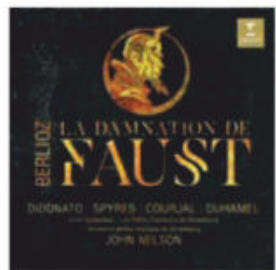
Erato ™ ③ (② + DVD) 9029 54173-5

(127' + 41' • DDD • S/T/t)

Recorded live at the Salle Érasme, Strasbourg,

April 25 & 26, 2019

DVD contains highlights from the April 25 concert



Two years on from their blockbusting, Award-winning *Les Troyens* (12/17), could

John Nelson's team repeat their Strasbourg success with *La damnation de Faust*? At half the running time of *Troyens*, and with a fraction of the cast, *Faust* isn't such a daunting task, but it's still a tricky work to bring off, a 'not-quite-opera' which Berlioz described as a *légende dramatique*.

What's never in doubt is that Nelson has a great feel for the weird structure of the piece, with its sudden lurches of pace and location (Berlioz shifting the action to the Hungarian plains just so he could include the crowd-pleasing Rakoczy March!). Nelson's pacing is uncannily 'right'; he's not one to force Berlioz, period-style, but he's no slouch either. He tempers excitement with grandeur – that Rakoczy March swaggers, while the tubas growl in the Ride to the Abyss. Meanwhile, there's delicacy in the 'Menuet des follets' and devilish wit in the pizzicato accompaniment to Méphistophélès's Serenade.

The acoustic of the Salle Érasme is very fine and Warner's engineering team has caught orchestra and chorus in perfect balance. The Gulbenkian Choir, from Lisbon, have a whale of a time, especially in the drinking songs in Auerbach's Cellar where their nasal 'Amen's' after Brander's Song of the Rat are genuinely funny, while their hellish

hisses and snarls in the Pandaemonium are chilling.

In Strasbourg, Joyce DiDonato received the star billing, but the role of Marguerite is marginal. Indeed, she doesn't even appear until Part 3. There's a buttery softness to DiDonato's top which is most winning in the love duet, while in the gorgeous aria 'D'amour l'ardente flamme' she is beautifully partnered by Jean-Michel Crétet's cor anglais obligato.

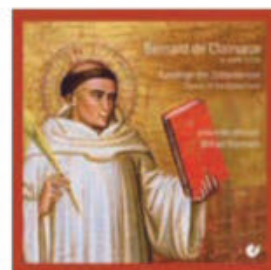
Central to the whole work is the pairing of Faust and Méphistophélès. Michael Spyres's golden tenor is so well suited to Berlioz. He was a terrific Énée in *Troyens* and is just as thrilling here, especially when soaring above the staff in *voix mixte* in 'Ange adoré' or 'Merci, doux crépuscule!'. One senses Spyres flagging slightly in 'Nature immense', pushing a little too hard in places, but that shouldn't detract from a winning portrayal.

I do have reservations about Nicolas Courjal's Devil. On the concert platform, he looked wonderfully suave and cynical, but vocally his cloudy bass isn't secure enough at the top to float numbers like the lullaby 'Voici des roses'. José van Dam, on Kent Nagano's excellent recording (recently available as part of Warner's 'Complete Works' issued for this year's Berlioz 150th anniversary – 4/19), is so much silkier. That account also includes Susan Graham as a marvellous Marguerite, but this new version is a very serious competitor in the *Faust* stakes. **Mark Pullinger**

Bernard of Clairvaux

'Chants of the Cistercians'

Anonymous Anima mea/Descendi in hortum/ Alma redemptoris mater. Bernardus doctor inclytus. Bernardus inclytis. Domine, labia mea aperies. Ecce iste venit. Electa mea. Et dilectus meus. Filiae Jerusalem. Quae est ista. Quam pulchra es. Sancte Bernarde. Surge, propera. Verbum caro factum est. Virgo nobilis/Verbum caro/Et veritate. Vox turturis **Bernard of Clairvaux** Jubilus rhythmicus de nomine Jesu **Ensemble Officium** / **Wilfried Rombach** Christophorus © CHRO217-2 (61' • DDD • T/t) From CHR77301 (2008)



Unlike more specialised ensembles, Officium's remit ranges broadly across

the Middle Ages and Renaissance. This tightly organised plainchant programme focuses on the Cistercian order and its founder, St Bernard of Clairvaux (d1153); some of these chants are traditionally attributed to him. His preference was for a sober style of worship; nonetheless, the rhythmicised chants heard here set the toes tapping.

The approach is varied, to say the least: at times the chant is set to drones, at others to simple organum; some is simply doubled at the octave with mixed voices. On the other hand, Officium eschew the ornaments and microtonal inflections embraced by more specialist chant ensembles, which seems a missed opportunity given the sensuousness of the texts from the Song of Songs, which held a special fascination for the order's founder. As in everything they do, Officium are never less than considered and careful (in the best sense), but here it can appear that the idiom is apprehended from the outside rather than fully inhabited – an impression confirmed by the motet from the Codex Las Huelgas (a Cistercian foundation) that closes the disc. Worth exploring, nevertheless. **Fabrice Fitch**

Bliss

The Enchantress^a. Mary of Magdala^b.

Meditations on a Theme by John Blow

^a**Dame Sarah Connolly** *mez* ^b**James Platt** *bass*

BBC Symphony ^b**Chorus and Orchestra** /

Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos © CHSA5242 (77' • DDD/DSD • T)



Conceived in 1951 as a vehicle for the great Kathleen Ferrier, Bliss's splendidly



Joyce DiDonato is among the superb soloists in a live account of Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust* from Strasbourg with the masterly John Nelson

effective and abundantly characterful scena *The Enchantress* takes its text from the Second Idyll of Theocritus in a free adaptation by the composer's poet friend, Henry Reed (1914-86). There's formidable competition from Chandos's own 1989 recording (7/91) featuring the contralto Linda Finnie in partnership with the Ulster Orchestra under Vernon Handley (who always was one of the composer's most loyal champions), but Sarah Connolly's thrillingly commanding and excitingly involving portrayal of the spurned Simaetha (who resorts to witchcraft to lure back her lover Delphis) demands to be heard, and she enjoys polished and committed backing from the excellent BBC SO under Andrew Davis.

Both remaining items were commissioned by the Feeney Trust, *Meditations on a Theme by John Blow* in 1955 and *Mary of Magdala* in 1962. First heard at the 1963 Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, the latter (here receiving its premiere recording) proved to be Bliss's final collaboration with his favourite librettist, Christopher Hassall (1912-63), and bears a dedication to his memory. Intertwined with two poems by Edward Sherburne (1618-1702) and Rowland Watkins (1614-64), it's an adaptation of the text from the Gospel of St John describing

Mary Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus. The resulting, immaculately crafted cantata exhibits an enviable discernment, intimacy of feeling, luminosity of texture and gentle radiance that are most gratifying (wonderfully tender woodwind-writing in the last section). Connolly is in lustrous voice once again, and there are notable contributions from the BBC Symphony Chorus and bass James Platt.

Bliss himself thought the *Meditations* one of his very best things, and there's much to admire in this ambitious and shrewdly plotted set of variations based on a tune from John Blow's 1677 verse anthem *The Lord is my shepherd*. Especially exquisite is the silk-spun delicacy of Meditation 3 ('Lambs') and serene poise of Meditation 5 ('In green pastures') – and, from 2'04" in the concluding processional, who could fail to respond to the violins' exuberant decoration of that majestic quotation of Blow's theme in its entirety? At the same time, there's no missing the sinister undertow that frequently rises to the surface in this music, most potently so in the work's penultimate Interlude ('Through the valley of the shadow of death') and just before the end of the work. Davis presides over a keenly idiomatic and agreeably purposeful account of this substantial and moving score that

most closely resembles Handley's rewarding August 1979 recording with the CBSO (Warner, 8/80).

Aficionados will naturally want to investigate this excellent release and can rest assured that both Ralph Couzens's engineering and Andrew Burn's annotation leave nothing to be desired.

Andrew Achenbach

Gesualdo

Madrigals: Book 1 – Baci soavi, e cari; Bella Angioletta da le vaghe piume; Com'esser può ch'io viva se m'uccidi?; Felice primavera; Gelo ha Madonna il seno; Madonna, io ben vorrei; Mentre Madonna il lasso fianco posa; Mentre, mia stella, miri; Non mirar, non mirare; O dolce mio martire; Questi leggiadri odorosetti fiori; Se da sì nobil mano; Si gioioso mi fanno i dolor miei; Son sì belle le rose; Tirsi morir volea; **Book 2** – All'apparir di quelle luci ardenti; Candida man, qual neve, a gl'occhi offerse; Caro amoroso neo; Dalle odorate spoglie; Hai rotto, e sciolto, e spento a poco a poco; In più leggiadro velo; Non è questa la mano; Non mai, non cangerò; Non mi toglia il ben mio; O come è gran martire; Se così dolce è il duolo; Sento che nel partire; Se per lieve ferita; Se taccio, il duol s'avanza

Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew

Harmonia Mundi (two discs for the price of one) HAF890 5307/8 (82' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at the Cité de la Musique, Paris,
June 2019



Some 30 years ago
Iain Fenlon referred
to Les Arts Florissants' initial Gesualdo disc

as their 'first foray into the schizophrenic world of Gesualdo's five-voice madrigals' (10/88). His words encapsulated perfectly a common overarching view of Gesualdo's virtuoso chromaticism which suited the text-centred, quick-fire responses of William's Christie's original singers so well. Now the ensemble return to Gesualdo's madrigals with Paul Agnew at the helm and a new generation of voices as they celebrate their 40th-anniversary concerts. Beginning with Books 1 and 2, we encounter lesser-known and less extrovert works but find the ensemble crackling with that same intellectual energy.

Throughout this recording the unaccompanied voices underplay Gesualdo's quirks, consigning actions and emotions to subtler, less frenetic planes than others have before, and maintain flowing, conversational tempos. Take the opening of Book 1, 'Baci soavi, e cari' ('Kisses sweet and tender'), where the voices are flushed, blushing with quick and tender kisses. How unencumbered and mobile these singers are compared to the Gesualdo Consort Amsterdam (CPO, 2/06). Likewise, the harpsichord used by Concerto delle Dame di Ferrara (Brilliant Classics) feels unnecessarily persistent by comparison. The fleeting nature of Gesualdo's flurried passages is a particular speciality of Les Arts Florissants: after a still, frigid opening to 'Gelo ha Madonna il seno' ('My lady has ice in her heart'), the change to flickering flames in her eyes is impressively palpable.

With the sound of their Award-winning Monteverdi madrigals (1/15, 7/15, 2/17) fresh in our ears, this new disc, also made from live recordings, offers fresh views of that famous madrigalian fork-in-the-road: Monteverdi's experimental laboratory veered towards monody, Gesualdo's led him to push further into the polyphonic web, fracturing texts and harmonies. The sheer inquisitive delight that these singers bring to Gesualdo's extraordinary world indicates a very exciting series ahead.

Edward Breen

CH Graun

'Apollo et Dafne - Italian Cantatas'
Apollo amante di Dafne. Cinna - Sinfonia.
Disperata Porcia. Lavinia a Turno

Hannah Morrison *sop* Main Baroque Orchestra
Accent (F) ACC24362 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Among the deluge
of Baroque solo
cantatas from
18th-century

Italy – most celebrated in the elder Scarlatti's Neapolitan output – there's a rich seam of contemporary German parodists who made the genre their own. In the case of Carl Heinrich Graun (and his younger brother, Johann Gottlieb), Italian virtuoso cantatas for superstar castratos would have formed a deep impression during his apprenticeship years in Dresden, to be revisited in mid-century Berlin at the behest of Frederick the Great.

These three cantatas – two of which cannot be attributed with certainty to either brother – reveal highly accomplished and mature Baroque stylists working in the customarily amorous Arcadian manner, and yet also adopting dramatic mythological shards of operatic proportions. The central work is in the latter vein, *Apollo amante di Dafne* – gently scored and exploiting a variety of registral coloration which, arguably, best suits the responsive and clear-toned singing of Hannah Morrison. The coloratura elsewhere is efficient, if never spectacular and the upper reaches not always convincing. But this is a voice that unerringly delivers textual sentiment with intelligence and an elegance devoid of mannerism.

The playing of Frankfurt's Main-Barockorchester provides disciplined and lively accompaniments for Morrison, the collective ensemble operating most persuasively in the fine cantata *Lavinia a Turno*. With its text fashioned from the Aeneid, Graun (and this is Carl Heinrich, for certain) propels its cautiously *galant* strains towards Lavinia's agonising fate as she follows the will of her father and marries Aeneas – recently fled from Troy and whom she does not love.

The final aria is a form of 'rage' aria, as her lover turns his back and Lavinia exclaims 'resto vittima del dolor' (I remain the victim of this agony). This is where the music needs lifting from the page with visceral projection and character, rather than the studious placement it receives here. Nevertheless, this recital offers a pleasing exposé of a conservative but eminent Kapellmeister in the generation before JC Bach and Haydn.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Handel

Samson, HWV57

Mary Bevan, Sophie Bevan, Fflur Wyn *sops*
Jess Dandy *contr* Joshua Ellicott, Hugo Hymas
tens Matthew Brook, Vitali Rozynko *basses*
Tiffin Boys' Choir; Dunedin Consort / John Butt
Linn (F) ③ CKD599 (3h 24' • DDD • T)



Amid Handel's
fluctuating fortunes
in London's cultural
marketplace, *Samson*

remained a reliable banker. Its popularity quickly spread beyond the capital, bolstered by two 'hit' numbers, Samson's starkly simple 'Total eclipse' and the soprano's 'Let the bright seraphim'; and for two centuries and more after Handel's death it probably received more performances than any of his oratorios bar *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*. Despite the static first act, Newburgh Hamilton's adaptation of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* is one of the best librettos Handel set, and the one most aligned to Greek tragedy. Its dramatic confrontations between the divinely chosen yet fatally flawed hero and his adversaries, including his former wife, inspired some of Handel's most colourful, powerfully characterised music, culminating in an elegy (added by Hamilton) that rivals *Saul's* in poignancy.

In the surprisingly sparse *Samson* discography, the clear winner has long been the direct, unfussy version from Harry Christophers and The Sixteen (Coro, 8/97), with typically polished, spirited choral work and a well-chosen cast. Recreating what was performed at the 1743 Covent Garden premiere – which means no funeral march after Samson's death – John Butt's superbly played and sung new recording, likewise made in the ideal, glowing acoustic of St Jude-on-the-Hill in Hampstead Garden Suburb, strikes me as even better.

From the Philistine revels of 'Awake the trumpet's lofty sound!' to the grave intensity of the requiem for Samson, the choruses, with the singers placed in front of the orchestra, have a thrilling immediacy. Following known Handelian precedent, the soprano line mixes women, including the soloists, with boy trebles (here from Tiffin School) to produce a flavoursome combination of richness and brightness. In his *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* (OUP: 1959), scholar Winton Dean provocatively invoked Verdi's 'Dies irae' in the scene of the Philistines' destruction ('Hear us, O God!'). The Dunedin forces, more operatically vivid



Urgent sense of theatre: John Butt directs a winning team of soloists and the Dunedin Consort in a vividly colourful account of Handel's *Samson*

than *The Sixteen*, make Dean's point. At the other end of the spectrum, John Butt's broader tempo enhances the nobility of the final chorus of Act 1, 'Then round about the starry throne'.

One novelty here, explained in the booklet (which includes illuminating essays by Ruth Smith and Butt himself), is that the choruses have been recorded twice. The version you hear on the CD uses a full choir of around 40 singers, while the other, only available digitally, comprises the eight soloists plus a second alto. This slimmed-down approach again has Handelian precedent, though the resultant clarity never quite compensates for the loss of sonorous grandeur.

With no weak link, Butt's soloists are at least a match for Christophers's. In the title-role, tenor Joshua Ellicott lacks the heroic weight of Christophers's dark-toned Thomas Randle but drew me more deeply into Samson's plight: in his spiritual anguish ('Total eclipse' is moving in its quiet inwardness and lack of rhetoric), in the graphic encounters with Dalila and the Philistine heavy Harapha, and in his serene, cathartic 'Thus when the sun', where Butt's spacious tempo again pays dividends. Sophie and Mary Bevan, both natural Handelian stylists, are well-nigh ideal. Sophie, slightly richer and darker in tone than her sister, sings Dalila's arias

with seductive grace and gives every bit as good as she gets in the slanging match of 'Traitor to love'. Mary's 'Let the bright seraphim' is delightful in its mingled buoyancy and refinement of detail.

Jess Dandy, a true contralto, is the oratorio's voice of balm, singing the sublime prayer 'Return, O God of hosts' with warm, even tone and broad phrasing. Her distinctive fast vibrato may initially disconcert some, though I quickly got used to it. As Samson's father Manoah, Matthew Brook fields a ripe yet agile bass. His chastened tenderness in 'How willing my paternal love' is profoundly moving. Though not quite happy in the runs of 'Honour and arms', Vitali Rozyanko makes a darkly formidable Harapha, relishing the Philistine's sarcastic taunting of Samson. Soprano Fflur Wyn and tenor Hugo Hymas, singing with attractive youthful tone, do well in supporting roles.

While those who already own the Christophers recording need not rush to replace it, this new *Samson* now becomes the top recommendation: for its uniformly excellent soloists, its excitingly 'present' choral singing and, above all, its more urgent sense of theatre. If you're tempted, the muscular 'Fix'd in his everlasting seat', graphically pitting Dagon against Jehovah, or the Israelites' imploring 'With thunder armed' should clinch it. **Richard Wigmore**

K Jenkins

Miserere: Songs of Mercy and Redemption

Iestyn Davies *countertenor* Belinda Sykes *voice/mey*

Abel Selaocoe *vc* Catrin Finch *hp* Maya Youssef

qanun Zanda Duggan, Jody Jenkins *perc*

Polyphony / Stephen Layton

Decca/Universal © 481 8580 (51' • DDD)



Karl Jenkins has dedicated his new choral work to those in the Middle East

who have suffered in the recent turbulent history of their lands. The texts are drawn from biblical times to 'Eli Jenkins' Prayer' from Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* and beyond. This is music of consolation, set in a popular idiom, that is surprisingly upbeat in tone given its dedication.

The sounds of the casbah fill the air in the opening movement as the singer Belinda Sykes calls for mercy in ancient tongues, accompanied by instruments particular to the region. The blend of the old and the new is ingeniously woven together in many instances, notably in the chugging rhythm of the psalms 'Lavabis me' and 'Praise, Joy & Gladness', with its syncopated rat-a-tat-tat plosives on the word 'praise'. The fiery 'Rahma', to be sung 'in a tribal way', is another



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rhythmically driven piece, emphasising the word ‘mercy’ in five different tongues.

The *a cappella* movements are special, their delivery by Polyphony exemplary. ‘Ubi caritas’ never fails to bring out the best in a composer; here the music rocks gently back and forth between time signatures. ‘Rockingham’ (‘When I survey’) and ‘Locus iste’ blend harmonies beloved of the close harmony school and ‘Eli Jenkins’ Prayer’ concludes with a magical Epilogue, moving from A flat to A, scored for string quartet. Iestyn Davies adds his honey-toned countertenor to the lovely ‘Panis angelicus’ and, like the cellist Abel Selaocoe, brings to *Miserere* a heart-warming presence. Stephen Layton, the conductor, has relished the experience too, and is quoted as saying that he has found himself singing tunes from it over and over again.

The recording has been mixed with evident loving care by Andrew Walter at Abbey Road. **Adrian Edwards**

Kurtág

‘The Edge of Silence’

Attila József Fragments, Op 20. Three Old Inscriptions, Op 25. Requiem for the Beloved, Op 26. Scenes from a Novel, Op 19.

SK Remembrance Noise, Op 12. Seven Songs, Op 22. A Twilight in Winter Recollected, Op 8

Susan Narucki *sop* **Curtis Macomber** *vn*

Kathryn Schulmeister *db* **Donald Berman** *pf*

Nicholas Tolle *cimbalom*

Avie © AV2408 (65’ • DDD • T/t)

Kurtág

Eight Duos, Op 4. Hommage à Berényi

Ferenc 70. Scenes from a Novel, Op 19. Several Movements from Georg Christoph Lichtenberg’s ‘Scrapbooks’, Op 37a. Seven Songs, Op 22.

A Twilight in Winter Recollected, Op 8

Viktoriia Vitrenko *sop* **David Grimal** *vn*

Niek de Groot *db* **Luigi Gaggero** *cimbalom*

Audite © AUDITE97 762 (61’ • DDD)



Coincidences like this are rare indeed at the high modernist end of the music spectrum. Two new CDs of Kurtág’s works for solo voice each begin with *Scenes from a Novel* (1979-82), the follow-up to his first collection of Rimma Dalos settings, *Messages of the Late RV Troussova* (1976-80), the composition that did most to make his name in the West as a Hungarian-born talent equal (if not superior) to Ligeti. Like *Messages*, *Scenes* is a fine example of later 20th-century expressionism – more like

an explosive operatic monodrama (setting Dalos’s tersely impassioned verses in their original Russian) than a gently lyrical song-cycle; and its instrumental accompaniment, scored for violin, double bass and cimbalom, provides brilliantly graphic contexts for the protagonist’s agonised narration.

Both singers, Susan Narucki and Viktoriia Vitrenko, give persuasive performances, ensuring that the shrieks and swoops with which Kurtág underlines the extreme emotions involved do not get in the way of the soaring, immersive eloquence that is the music’s strongest suit. Maybe the Avie recording for Narucki is just that bit more spacious and smoothly balanced than the Audite version. But there are more obvious differences that may make it easier to choose one over the other. Audite expects you to download the crucial texts, rather than providing them in the booklet as Avie does, and Audite’s English versions of the German notes are not ideally idiomatic. Also in Avie’s favour is the rest of the programme, which offers the mesmerising monodies of the *Attila József Fragments* (1981) as the main complement to *Scenes from a Novel*. Audite opts for the 22 often tiny aphorisms setting German texts taken from the scrapbooks of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1999).

These were originally drafted as vocal monodies, Kurtág eventually adding the double bass accompaniments included here. Given the quirky character of Lichtenberg’s texts – sometimes teasingly abstract, sometimes gnomically whimsical – the role of the accompaniment is inevitably less expressively transparent than with the more atmospheric Dalos or József settings, and the overall effect is rather less rewarding. Yet even if the programmes as a whole are not sufficiently complementary to encourage an unqualified recommendation for buying both, Audite’s inclusion of two purely instrumental works, the early set of Duos for violin and cimbalom and the tiny *Hommage à Berényi Ferenc*, which ends the disc with Kurtág in unusually gentle, even nostalgic mood, are difficult to resist. **Arnold Whittall**

Palestrina

Lamentations - Book 2

Cinquecento

Hyperion © CDA68284 (72’ • DDD • T/t)



Palestrina’s second book of Lamentations is surprisingly passionate, and this

performance in particular is a gentle reminder that the spacious, clear polyphony of the Ars Perfecta did not preclude a great deal of passionate nuance. Cinquecento – like a European chapel choir of the Renaissance – brings together a fine selection of singers from across the continent, forming a true European union. Their performance of these Lamentations adheres closely to the text, balancing each madrigalian nuance within the overall phrase architecture. Their sound is reminiscent of The Hilliard Ensemble, particularly in the delightful interplay of their two well-matched tenors and the warmth of the overall blend captured through a close, warm recording technique.

Perhaps the most striking musical feature is the generous music that Palestrina lays out for the Hebrew letters beginning each Lamentation text, which often showcases the lower sonorities of these singers. Take, for instance, Lectio III for Maunday Thursday: first there is a slipstream of luxuriant polyphony for the letter *caph*, where the voices are rich, resonant and perfectly balanced, and later there is another superb meld of lower voices and sonorous purity in ‘O vos omnes’. At moments like this you have to admire how much yearning and mourning, dissonance and suspension Palestrina got under the net – these Lamentations, and particularly this performance, really do reframe Ars Perfecta in a wider context.

On this note I particularly admire ‘Magna est enim velut mare contritio tua’ (For your downfall is as great at the sea) from the Lamentations for Good Friday, where the sea almost literally sweeps in for this verse. But perhaps the most arresting and unexpected touch is the eight-voice setting of ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem’ at the end of Lectio III for Holy Saturday, where three extra tenor parts fill out the texture and create a magical ending. Throughout this album Cinquecento offer a performance which is truly reflective and tender. **Edward Breen**

Rore

I madrigali a cinque voci

Blue Heron / Scott Metcalfe

Blue Heron © ② BHCD1009 (121’ • DDD • T/t)



A musical landmark it undoubtedly is, but few would claim that Cipriano de Rore’s first book of madrigals constitutes easy listening. The distance between it and, say, Arcadelt’s *Il bianco e dolce cigno* (published

three years earlier, in 1539) is startling. The dense, motet-like texture is almost unrelenting and the words are absorbed into the music, requiring the full attention of listener and performer. The noted specialist Jessie Ann Owens's lucid introduction clearly sets out the nature of the challenge thrown down by Rore to his contemporaries and, one feels, later listeners as well. (Scott Metcalfe deals similarly with issues of performance practice, by no means as straightforward as one might think for music clearly intended for vocal soloists.)

None of this is meant to put prospective listeners off, but to suggest how high the bar is set: the appeal of 'difficult' music is timeless, and it takes dedicated performers to break through to whatever lies beyond. Rore is worlds away from Blue Heron's Peterhouse project but the same technical standards, seriousness of purpose and communicative musicality are very much in evidence. They tackle Rore's lofty idealism head-on. Despite the thick texture, his imitative points are always clearly audible; and when he responds to some affect in the text, they subtly inflect the beat or the delivery. (A seeming ease in overcoming self-imposed difficulty is, after all, key to the aesthetic of the time.) Could the music breathe a little more, all the same? At times, perhaps, yes. To me, things go best when the soprano, rather than the countertenor, has the top line, because her timbre more easily contrasts with and cuts through the lower voices. But to bear the repeated listening the music demands, one must feel that details are in their proper place; in this sense, neither composer nor listener is sold short. To be fair, Rore himself offers the uninitiated a way in: the last three madrigals are easier to approach, like some of his subsequent later madrigals (the Petrarchan cycle on 'Le vergine' is a case in point). Though positioned as a kind of postscript, they're a good place to begin.

The text of each madrigal is read aloud prior to performance – sensibly, on separate tracks. This has been done before, but rarely if ever so convincingly. This is (seriously) impressive. **Fabrice Fitch**

Schumann

Myrthen, Op 25

Christian Gerhaher bar Camilla Tilling sop

Gerold Huber pf

Sony Classical © 19075 94536-2 (49' • DDD • T/t)



For the second volume of their Schumann project, Christian Gerhaher and Gerold

Huber turn to *Myrthen*, the wonderful wedding present Robert produced for Clara in 1840. It also sees the first contribution to the project by a 'guest' artist, and it's maybe difficult, given the remarkable interpretative universe they create (as showcased especially in the *Gramophone* Award-winning Vol 1 – 2/19), not to see Camilla Tilling as a sort of interloper.

Happily, though, she's a fine singer, her soprano bright and appealing (if occasionally a little glassy), and her interpretations well-turned and, especially as the cycle progresses, deeply touching (listen to her 'Hochländisches Wiegenlied', for example). She kicks off with a fresh performance of 'Widmung' and takes no time to find her place in Gerhaher and Huber's world, working together beautifully with the pianist, whose rubato in such hits as 'Der Nussbaum' and 'Die Lotosblume' is meltingly seductive. If she doesn't quite match, to my mind, the instinctiveness of Dorothea Röschmann's fresh, impulsive and heartfelt singing on her recording with Ian Bostridge and Graham Johnson, Tilling nevertheless offers an effective, satisfying complement to Gerhaher's own approach.

And there are certainly no disappointments from the baritone, who recaptures the wonderful feeling of studied spontaneity that made the first volume of the series so special. The slighter numbers are dispatched with a wit that is underpinned by an overall seriousness of purpose, and the forceful rhetoric of 'Talismane' is captured more successfully than by Bostridge and Johnson, whose slightly slower tempo adds an unwanted hint of portentousness.

The two Venetian Songs are gloriously relaxed; 'Du bist wie eine Blume' is almost unspeakably tender, as is 'Zum Schluss'. And at the heart of the cycle Gerhaher and Huber present a supremely moving and powerful performance of the remarkable 'Aus den hebräischen Gesängen'. *Myrthen* on its own might seem like short measure, but this is a rewarding second volume to what is growing into a superb series and certainly a top choice for this wonderful cycle. **Hugo Shirley**

Selected comparison:

Röschmann, Bostridge, Johnson (A/02) (HYPER) CDJ33107

Schütz

Historia der Geburt Christi, 'The Christmas Story', SWV435. Ave Maria, SWV334. Der Engel sprach zu den Hirten, SWV395. Hodie Christus natus est, SWV456. Ein Kind ist uns geboren, SWV384. Magnificat, SWV468. Das Wort ward Fleisch, SWV385

Yale Schola Cantorum / David Hill

Hyperion © CDA68315 (71' • DDD • T/t)



This attractive all-Schütz programme places his *Christmas Story* alongside other

seasonal German- and Latin-texted works, culminating in the very Venetian-sounding *Magnificat* setting. The Yale Schola Cantorum comprises roughly 30 singers and a dozen instrumentalists, but they sound light and bright nonetheless.

They make a fine impression in the opening *Hodie Christus natus est*, and the choir's interventions are among the most telling on this CD; only when the word-setting becomes more animated is the diction less secure. (They next appear as a group in the six-voice *Ein Kind ist uns geboren*, from the *Geistliche Chormusik*.) David Hill's sense of shaping and narrative sweep is equally positive but cannot really compensate for the set's major drawback, the unevenness of the soloists. This is a real shame, given how much of the argument rests on their shoulders. While nothing goes seriously awry, uncertain intonation and their diffidence in cutting loose in the more florid passages gets in the way of one's enjoyment. That said, soprano Addy Sterrett's timbre imparts a touch of magic to her characterisation of the Angel in the *Christmas Story*.

Given the available competition (not least Carus's recently completed survey of Schütz's entire output), an essentially sympathetic enterprise is that much harder to recommend wholeheartedly. **Fabrice Fitch**

Strozzi

'Virtuosa of Venice'

Ferrari Amanti io vi so dire **Fontei** Dio ti salvi pastor **Kapsperger** Kapsperger. Preludes - III; X; XI. Toccata XI **Maione** Ricerca sopra il canto fermo di costanzo festa per sonar l'arpa **Monteverdi** Si dolce e'l tormento **Selma y Salaverde** Vestiva hi colli passeggiato **Strozzi** Al battitor di bronzo. I baci. Begli occhi. Conclusione dell'opera, 'Voi sete, o begli occhi'. L'eraclito amoroso. Grande allegrezza di cuore. Lagrime mie. Morso e bacio. Il ritorno. Sospira respira

Fieri Consort

Fieri © FIER003VOV (67' • DDD • T/t)



Barbara Strozzi (1619-77) published eight collections of chamber vocal

music – almost all secular and most of them extant (Op 4 is lost). Although a range of her extraordinary music forms the bulk of

numerous albums by eminent singers, many of these are long out of print and some currently fetch silly money second-hand. It is baffling that no artist has ever launched a coherent attempt to record her complete works.

In conjunction with Henry Bauckham's new play *Her Father's Voice* (a dramatisation of Strozzi's life drawing from original eyewitness accounts), the Fieri Consort offer a glimpse into the sophisticated union of poetry and harmony that the Venetian created for her performances at the Accademia degli Unisoni. Ten diverse pieces are cherry-picked from Strozzi's madrigals, duets and cantatas (Opp 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7). The singing has highly effective clarity and sincerity, and is accompanied with tasteful discretion and precision by a revolving continuo trio of theorbist Toby Carr (sometimes swapping over to guitar), harpist Aileen Henry and gambist Harry Buckoke.

Two solo cantatas conveying the weeping of forsaken lovers are sung by sopranos Lucinda Cox (*L'eraclito amoroso*) and Hannah Ely (*Lagrime mie*) with bittersweet eloquence. In the duets, Ely and Cox convey eroticism of musical nuances and poetry eloquently (*Begli occhi*), tenors Josh Cooter and Tom Kelly bewail the burning sensations of thankless love (*Al battitor di bronzo della sua crudelissima dama*), and the sunnier rejuvenating experience of felicitous love is expressed cheerfully by Cox and Kelly (*Il ritorno*).

A broader context of secular chamber music-making in Venice is illustrated by Monteverdi's lovely strophic song *Sì dolce è'l tormento* (published 1624), Nicolò Fontei's duet *Dio ti salvi pastor* (1636) and Benedetto Ferrari's witty ciaccona *Amanti io vi so dire* (1641) – all three composers were friends of Strozzi's father. There are also brief instrumental interludes by several composers, including five pieces from Kapsperger's *Libro quarto d'intavolatura di chitarrone* (1640). It is a nice touch that this timely celebration of Strozzi's quatercentenary ends with her soprano-free trio madrigal *Voi sete, o begli occhi*, sung tenderly by alto (Nancy Cole), tenor (Kelly) and bass (Ben McKee). **David Vickers**

Vaughan Williams

'The Song of Love'

Adieu. L'amour de moy. Buonaparty. To Daffodils. The House of Life. Jean Renaud. Three Old German Songs. Two Poems by Seumas O'Sullivan. Le psaume des batailles (Que Dieu se montre seulement). Quant li louseignolz (Quand le rossignol). Three Songs from Shakespeare. The Spanish Ladies. Think of me. The Turtle Dove. The Willow Song

Kitty Whately *mez* **Roderick Williams** *bar*

William Vann *pf*

Albion © ALBCD037 (69' • DDD • T/t)

Holst • Vaughan Williams

'Time and Space'

Holst Cradle Song, Op 16 No 5. Darest thou now O soul. Four Songs, Op 4. Six Songs, Op 15. Four Songs, Op 35 **Vaughan Williams** Along the Field. Blake's Cradle Song. A Cradle Song. Darest thou now O soul **Holst/Vaughan Williams** Folk Songs from the Eastern Counties and Hampshire

Mary Bevan *sop* **Roderick Williams** *bar*

Jack Liebeck *vn* **William Vann** *pf*

Albion © ALBCD038 (76' • DDD • T)



Early in his career Ralph Vaughan Williams was much taken with Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 1881 collection of 100 sonnets, *The House of Life*, setting four of them for voice and orchestra in *Willow-Wood* (1900), and another six for voice and piano in a song-cycle most likely begun in 1903. By far the best-known number from Vaughan Williams's *The House of Life* remains the justly loved 'Silent Noon' but there's some glorious inspiration to be found elsewhere, not least in 'Love-Sight', 'Death in Love' (which is almost scena-like in its dramatic reach) and 'Love's Last Gift'. Until now *The House of Life* has been the sole preserve of male vocalists on disc, so a warm welcome to this Albion newcomer. Indeed, the mezzo-soprano Kitty Whately's memorably affecting and delectably articulate contribution is of superlative quality and also serves to remind us that the cycle's first performance – on December 2, 1904, at London's Bechstein (now Wigmore) Hall – was given by a contralto, Edith Clegg, with Hamilton Harty on the piano. Whately also excels in the 1897 setting of *The Willow Song* and enchanting *Three Songs from Shakespeare* (1925, not to be confused with the *Three Shakespeare Songs* for mixed chorus from 1951), whose concluding 'Orpheus with his lute' comprises an altogether more pithy affair than RVW's earlier 1903 setting.

Elsewhere, the baritone Roderick Williams is on peak form in settings of seven French and German texts composed between 1902 and 1904, and is especially responsive to the rarefied atmosphere of *Two Poems by Seumas O'Sullivan* from 1925. Williams also affords splendidly lusty treatment to *The Spanish Ladies* (1912)

and has a ball with the rollicking 'Buonaparty' (1908) from Hardy's *The Dynasts* (originally destined for *Hugh the Drover*, it didn't make the final cut). Two duets from 1903 round off proceedings in charming fashion. Needless to report, William Vann's sensitive accompaniments are a constant source of pleasure. Outstandingly perceptive music-making, then, immaculately captured by producer Andrew Walton and balance engineer Deborah Spanton. John Francis's detailed and authoritative annotation is a model of its kind.

Williams and Vann likewise shine on a companion release devoted to songs by Vaughan Williams and his dear friend, Gustav Holst. To hear their artistry at its very best listen to track 22 for a lovely sequence of five folk-song arrangements from the eastern counties and Hampshire by the two composers (the subtle harmonic scope of Holst's setting of 'The Willow Tree' has much in common with George Butterworth's haunting treatment of it towards the close of *The Banks of Green Willow*). Singer and pianist prove just as responsive to Holst's Six Songs, Op 15, from 1902-03 (boasting three Hardy settings which won the poet's approval). The even earlier (1896-98) group of Four Songs, Op 4, is entrusted to soprano Mary Bevan, who lends especially bewitching advocacy to the two lullabies that open the set, 'Slumber-Song' (from Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies*) and 'Margrete's Cradle-Song' (from Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*) – the latter displaying a distinctly Griegian flavour that carries over into 'Soft and gently' (after Heine).

Utterly different again is the courageously individual and tenderly intimate aesthetic embraced by both Holst's Four Songs for voice and violin (1916-17) and its no less questing sibling, RVW's *Along the Field*, eight settings of AE Housman in all probability written around 1925 (unmistakable echoes here of *Flos campi* and *Riders to the Sea*). In both these off-the-beaten-track gems Bevan generates a profoundly moving rapport with the admirable Jack Liebeck. Albion's stimulating programme juxtaposes the two composers' handling of texts by Whitman ('Darest thou now O soul' from 'Whispers of Heavenly Death', published in *Leaves of Grass*) and Blake ('Cradle Song' from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*); RVW's touching treatment of the latter was fashioned in 1928 for *The Oxford Book of Carols*.

This is a peach of a disc, benefiting once more from top-notch production values – and it's good to learn that the Holst Society

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

SCHUBERT'S WINTERREISE

Hugo Shirley hears some recent recordings of this great song-cycle, confirming that this music can sustain a variety of approaches



One of the finest operatic baritones: Peter Mattei, with pianist Lars David Nilsson, is typically communicative

Not on the heels of Ian Bostridge's latest take on Schubert's wintery masterpiece (Pentatone, A/19), here come a handful of further *Winterreisen* showing the variety of approaches – and voices – that can be applied to these wonderful songs. Two of the singers featured are mainly active on the operatic stage, and there's a great deal to relish in their voices.

First up is **Peter Mattei** who, though a singer all but overlooked by the Royal Opera House in London, is one of the finest baritones of his generation – an intelligent and vividly communicative artist whose rich, healthy singing is difficult to resist. With sturdy support from Lars David Nilsson, he performs the cycle with the sort of directness and vocal charisma one would expect. His lovely, rounded tone makes an immediate impression in 'Gute Nacht', where, at Schubert's characteristic shift to the major, he also shows off a beautifully hushed *pianissimo*. As early as 'Die Wetterfahne' he also introduces an extra vividness, bringing added drama through some spiteful snarls and added breathiness.

He's at his considerable best, though, when building the emotional intensity patiently and directly, letting the power of the voice – inherently plangent and dramatic – communicate naturally. He brings a sturdy determination to 'Auf dem

Flusse', while 'Irrlicht' takes on a rare sense of grandeur, as does a thrilling account of 'Der stürmische Morgen'. 'Die Krähe' is movingly expressive, as are the final songs. Could there be more variety in the tone? Possibly; and there are a couple of arguable interpretative choices. But, vocally speaking, this is one of the handsomest versions of this work available.

The Slovak tenor **Pavol Breslik** is also a healthy-sounding wanderer, although he and Amir Katz take a little while to settle in their live performance – it's difficult to tell if the slight nerviness of 'Gute Nacht' is deliberate or not. As with Mattei, though, there's a charisma and directness – one's tempted to say an operatic quality – that's highly rewarding. The voice itself boasts plenty of steel, balanced out with an appealing hint of tremulousness, and is a fine, virile-sounding instrument. Katz's playing is musical and sensitive. I miss a certain level of detail and insight, and there are occasions when Breslik's German doesn't quite sound ideally idiomatic. But this is an affecting performance with a lot to enjoy.

Thomas Oliemans, alas, suffers in comparison with Breslik and, especially, Mattei. His voice is grainy, gravelly and, alas, fundamentally unalluring as soon as he pushes to anywhere around *mezzo-forte*. He's an eloquent artist and turns in moving accounts of the quieter songs –

there's a fine 'Leiermann' to crown the performance, for example – but it's difficult to enjoy such numbers as 'Erstarrung', where he has to resort to bluster. Pianist Paolo Giacometti is a little inconsistent, too. This recording has its moments but is generally difficult to recommend.

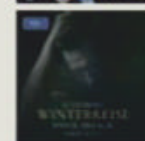
By way of contrast, I suggest sampling the sprightly, almost playful 'Frühlingstraum' in the recording from the baritone **Johannes Held** and his pianist, Daniel Beskow. Held's voice is on the light side, with a tenorial colour in its upper range, but he uses it sensibly and intelligently. He and Beskow have been performing the cycle together for some time and have developed an interpretation that is eminently communicative, slightly quirky, and in which one always feels a sense of hope and optimism – I jotted down 'likeable', not a word one associates with *Winterreise*. Again, there might be a few interpretative choices to quibble with but this is an eloquent, probing recording that's well worth seeking out.

The mezzo-soprano **Britta Schwarz** presents a more controversial option. She is joined by Christine Schornsheim on a robust-sounding 1827 Viennese fortepiano in a performance with an affecting honesty. Schwarz's voice itself, though, is likely to prove an acquired taste for many. Plangent, alternately slightly white and hooty, with not much warmth, it's not a big-sounding instrument. Nor is this conventionally attractive singing, often precluding a traditional intensity of engagement and offering limited variety of tone. The flipside, however, is a hypnotic quality as the cycle progresses. Stick with it, and you'll be rewarded with moving accounts of the final songs. **G**

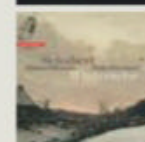
THE RECORDINGS



Schubert Winterreise
Mattei bar Nilsson pf
BIS (E) BIS2444



Schubert Winterreise
Breslik ten Katz pf
Orfeo (E) C934 191



Schubert Winterreise
Oliemans bar Giacometti pf
Channel Classics (E) CCS42119



Schubert Winterreise
Held bar Beskow pf
ARS Produktion (E) ARS38 562



Schubert Winterreise
Schwarz mez Schornsheim fp
Rondeau Production (E) ROP6182

(co-sponsor of this issue with the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society) intends to publish a volume to include no fewer than 43 songs by the composer that have languished in manuscript in the British Library. **Andrew Achenbach**

Wohlhauser

L'amour est un duperie – l'amour
n'est pas une symbiose

Christine Simolka *sop*

Ensemble Polysono / René Wohlhauser *bar/pf*

Neos © NEOS11824 (74' • DDD • T/t)



His may be an unfamiliar name but the Swiss composer René Wohlhauser

(b1954) has gained a wide reputation for his sizeable catalogue these past four decades, while being equally active as baritone, pianist and director. All of which are put to distinctive use in the present work, a chamber opera derived from texts by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Or it would have been had not the former's estate withheld permission, leading Wohlhauser to replace them with 'sound poetry' whose phonetics replicate the expressive content of Sartre's texts.

Other than Sartre's early treatise *L'être et le néant*, these texts (actual or intended) are letters exchanged over the period January 5 – February 23, 1940, when Sartre and de Beauvoir became engrossed in a sexual relationship as much about those others involved as themselves. This is enacted across a prologue and three parts, soprano and baritone partnered by an ensemble resembling that of *Pierrot lunaire* (but without violin), the manner which they merge into – even become – each other defining the essence of this piece as much as any purely semantic evolution. This is most evident in the second part, much the longest yet having the least text, in which voices and instruments lock into passages of melodic and rhythmic unison charged with an emotional intensity though also a confiding intimacy affecting in its tangible poise.

The performance, recorded in the studio following two European tours, sounds as focused and involving as expected given the lengthy collaboration between the composer and the Basel-based Ensemble Polysono. Christine Simolka makes a suitably alluring contribution, with Wohlhauser as committed vocally as in the sparing yet strategic piano part. It makes for an intriguing and provocative experience. One looks forward, moreover, to the stage premiere in 2051! **Richard Whitehouse**

'Baroque Gender Stories'

Galuppi Siroe – Ah non fuggirmi, ingrato;

Rendimi l'idol mio **Handel** Alcina – È gelosia.

Deidamia – Nell'armi e nell'amar. Serse – Cagion son io; Gran pena è gelosia; Se bramate d'amar chi vi sdegnate. Siroe – Overture; Deggio morire, o stelle; Son stanco, ingiusti numi **Hasse** Achille in Sciro – Risponderti vorrei. Siroe – Sinfonia

Lampugnani Semiramide riconosciuta – Crudel morir mi vedi; Tu mi disprezzi **Porpora**

Semiramide riconosciuta – Il pastor se torna

aprile **Traetta** Siroe – Che furia, che mostro

Vivaldi Orlando furioso – Insolito coraggio; Nel profondo cieco mondo; Orlando, allora il ciel

Wagenseil Siroe – Esci, crudel, d'affanno; La sorte mia tiranna

Vivica Genaux *mez* **Lawrence Zazzo** *countertenor*

Lautten Compagny / Wolfgang Katschner

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19075 94309-2

(87' • DDD • T/t)



Early 18th-century Italian opera companies often cast female voices in male

roles, and sometimes castratos took female roles according to the vicissitudes of local circumstances. For example, during some periods female performers were forbidden on stage in Rome, but throughout the rest of Europe good female singers were the preferred option for leading male characters if no suitable castrato was available. Beyond that, there are plenty of Baroque operas in which characters disguise themselves as someone of the opposite gender. Such fluidity inspires a playful double album by Vivica Genaux and Lawrence Zazzo, who take turns to sing every conceivable kind of character within the compass of their voice-type (male, female, and covertly disguised), regardless of the genders of the characters or their original performers.

Zazzo sings Amastre's wistful 'Cagion son io' (Handel's *Serse*) and Bradamante's furious 'È gelosia' (Handel's *Alcina*) – both female characters disguised as men that the countertenor is unlikely to perform on stage. On the other hand, Genaux's propulsive 'Nel profondo cieco mondo' from Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* sounds as if her unstable title-hero belongs on stage. These are heard in context alongside much less familiar music. Zazzo's spirited enactment of Tamiri's 'Tu mi disprezzi' from Lampugnani's setting of Metastasio's libretto *Semiramide riconosciuta* (Rome, 1741) is juxtaposed directly with Genaux's gentle dialogue with soft pastoral flutes and horns in Semiramide's 'Il pastor se torna aprile' from Porpora's version revived at Naples in 1739. Metastasio's drama *Siroe*,

re di Persia forms a strand throughout proceedings: there is a buoyant sinfonia featuring horns from Hasse's 1733 setting, Genaux's energetic accounts of Emira's furious outbursts composed by Galuppi (1754) and Traetta (1767), Zazzo's pathos-laden singing as the imprisoned hero in Handel's version (1728), and his limpid singing in two arias by Wagenseil (1748) – one for the *primo uomo* and another for the *prima donna*.

Wolfgang Katschner and Lautten Compagny provide lean, skilfully balanced and astute theatrical support. Clever artistic programming means that each half starts with a striking overture and culminates in an engaging duet, via a series of vividly contrasting musical styles, orchestral colours, speeds and moods. **David Vickers**

'A Spanish Nativity'

Flecha 'El Viejo' El Jubilate. Ríu ríu chíu

Guerrero A un niño llorando. Beata Dei genitrix

Maria Lobo Missa Beata Dei genitrix Maria

Morales Cum natus esset **Rimonte** De la piel de sus ovejas **Victoria** O magnum mysterium

Stile Antico

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2312 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Released in time for Christmas, Stile Antico's latest offering explores the

Spanish Golden Age from Morales to Victoria. The centrepiece is the Mass by Alonso Lobo, based on a motet by his master, Francisco Guerrero, with a few seasonal vilancicos by way of palate-cleansers. While the Mass is not explicitly for Christmas, the parent motet's emphasis on Mary as the begetter of the Christ child makes it a plausible choice. In any case it's a lovely work, opulent yet graceful, and one welcomes a second performance of it on disc (La Grande Chapelle recorded it six years ago – *Lauda Música*, 3/14 – but with soloists and chamber organ rather than several singers to a part, as here).

In the sacred music, Stile Antico deliver performances of admirable contrapuntal clarity, sonic bloom and opulence; devotees of their approach won't be disappointed. They could hardly dispute, however, that the secular pieces come off second best. Sensibly, Stile Antico take most of these with single voices, which is surely correct; but then one would expect a far greater projection of the text's affects. In Flecha's *Jubilate Deo*, the Virgin's colourful language in facing down Satan elicits little discernible response. The same goes for the narrator's occasional asides to the audience

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

FARINELLI'S LEGACY

Richard Wigmore revels in some breathtaking singing on two albums that chart the successes of the most celebrated 18th-century castrato

'Farinelli'

Broschi *La Merope* - Chi non sente al mio dolore; Sì, traditor tu sei **Caldara** *La morte d'Abel* - Questi al cor finora ignoti **Giacomelli** *Adriano in Siria* - Mancare o Dio mi sento **Hasse** *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* - Morte col fiero aspetto; Signor la tua Speranza ... A Dio trono, impero a Dio **Porpora** *La festa d'Imeneo* - Vaghi amori, grazie amate. **Polifemo** - Alto Giove; Lontan ... Lusingato dalla speme; Nell'attendere il mio bene. **Semiramide** regina dell'Assiria - Come nave in ria tempesta **Cecilia Bartoli** *mez*
Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini
Decca © 485 0214 (75' • DDD • T/t)

'The Farinelli Manuscript'

Anonymous *Invan ti chiamo, invan ti cerco, amato ... Al dolor che vo' sfogando* (attrib **Giacomelli**). *Son qual nave che agitata* (attrib **Broschi**) **Conforto** *Ogni dì più molesto ... Non sperar, non lusingarti* **Giacomelli** *Quell'usignolo* **Latilla** *Vuoi per sempre abbandonarmi? Mele lo sperai del porto in seno* **Ann Hallenberg** *mez* **Stile Galante / Stefano Aresi**
Glossa © GCD923521 (72' • DDD • T/t)



What would one give to time travel and hear the 18th century's most deified, mythified castrato, who in London provoked the accolade 'One God, one Farinelli'? The composer Joachim Quantz left a famous description of a singer who dazzled audiences not only with his virtuosity and freakish three-octave range but with his flawless 'taste' and expressive subtlety: 'A penetrating, full, rich, bright and well modulated soprano voice ... his intonation was pure, his trill beautiful, his breath control extraordinary and his throat very agile ... Passagework and all kinds of melismas were of no difficulty to him.' An impossible act to follow, of course. But it's hard to think of two contemporary singers who could revive Farinelli's repertoire with the skill and flair of Cecilia Bartoli and Ann Hallenberg.

Predictably, Bartoli is the more combustible of the two star mezzos, singing arias by Farinelli's mentor Nicola Porpora and his brother Riccardo Broschi with her trademark devil-may-care élan. She sets out her stall in the joyous 'Nell'attendere il mio bene' by Porpora, Handel's rival in London in the 1730s. With singing of such febrile energy, sound and verbal sense in perfect marriage, you can easily forgive the odd squally moment above the stave. Bartoli unfurls her perfectly controlled *messa di voce* in an alluringly phrased aria for Hymen from Porpora's *La festa d'Imeneo*, composed to celebrate the wedding of Frederick Prince of Wales – though you wouldn't glean this from the booklet.

Happily there is little here of that cooey, breathy tone which can quickly pall. In 'Alto Giove', now a popular aria with countertenors, Bartoli touchingly, and specifically, catches the dazed wonder of Acis as he is transformed into a fountain. Seconded by the percussive, hyperactive strings of Il Giardino Armonico, she is ferociously in her element in a 'rage' aria from Hasse's *Marc'Antonio e Cleopatra* and conveys an underlying restless anxiety in the ostensibly happy 'Lusingato dalla speme' from *Polifemo*. Bartoli also vindicates a pair of less distinguished arias by Farinelli's brother Riccardo Broschi, etching sorrow into the texture of her voice in 'Chi non sente al mio dolore' and pulling out all the bravura stops in the vengeful trumpeting of 'Sì, traditor tu sei'. Here and elsewhere she mines the expressive and dramatic potential of the Italian language with

Cecilia Bartoli sings with combustible virtuosity

unique intensity. Her terrifying cry of 'barbaro' will have you cowering.

While this is as at least as fine vocally as Bartoli's recent Vivaldi album (2/19), Decca's visually lavish presentation lives down to the same dubious standards. I suppose some might be amused/intrigued by the endless photos of a bearded Bartoli looking for all the world like a feminised Russell Brand. There are good essays, including one by Alexandra Coghlan, on the Farinelli phenomenon. But – here I go again – nowhere is there a word on the context of these arias, crucial to a full appreciation of the music. If you're wondering who on earth is Eptide in Broschi's *La Merope* or Nino in Porpora's



Semiramide, I'm with you. Will someone at Decca ever get the point?

Depressingly, Glossa's otherwise scholarly booklet notes likewise breathe not a word about the context of the six (mainly) rare arias on Ann Hallenberg's album 'The Farinelli Manuscript'. In semi-retirement in Madrid, the castrato assembled these arias, many of which he sang to allay King Philip V's depression, as a gift to Empress Maria Theresa. On the cusp of the Baroque and the *galant*, they tend to be thinner musically than the arias on the Bartoli album. With its reams of inanely insistent triplets and sudden rocketing high notes, the anonymous 'Al dolor che vo' sfogando' that ends the disc emerges as little more than a series of vocal exercises.

Still, Hallenberg, her mellow yet incisive tone perfectly 'centred', has you gasping in admiration at her mingled virtuosity and expressive power. While her coloratura is less frenziedly driven than Bartoli's (which some may deem an advantage), she rivals the Italian in go-for-it bravado. In Broschi's rip-roaring tempest-at-sea aria 'Son qual nave' (the one relatively familiar item here), Hallenberg strides fearlessly across the two-and-a-half octave compass, unerring in her negotiation of improbable leaps and plunges, and deploying a sonorous baritone extension in the slow central section.

Beyond the virtuoso fireworks, Farinelli was famed for the subtle inwardness of his singing. Hallenberg can be aptly dulcet too, whether in a flirtatious minuet aria by Farinelli's one-time colleague Niccolò Conforto, sung with a smile in the tone, or the tender pathos of Gaetano Latilla's 'Vuoi per sempre abbandonarmi?' (we deduce merely that this is a woman jilted by her faithless lover). With the breath control of an underwater swimmer, she takes in her stride the extravagances of Farinelli's added ornaments and cadenzas ('Wow' was my scribbled reaction, more than once); and crucially for a singer of this repertoire she musters a true trill.

All the while Stefano Aresi's Stile Galante, using single strings, are vivid accompanists. Playing with the bell held upwards, trilling horns create a spectacular racket in an otherwise bland aria by the obscure Giovanni Mele. Reservations linger about the musical quality of these prolix display arias. But if anyone today – other than Bartoli – has the technique and imagination to make them live, it's Ann Hallenberg. **G**

(‘oh what a lovely song!’) or the rapidity with which the music changes tack. Given the music's overt staging (only recall how Ensemble Clément Janequin dealt with such things), such forbearance is positively frustrating. (For another comparison across the years, try the Taverner Consort's sophisticated lack of cultivation in their *Riu riu chíu* from their first 'Carol Album' – EMI/Warner, 12/89.) And I'd say something similar about the sacred music. The funereal tempo chosen for Victoria's famous *O magnum mysterium* gives the singers little scope to shape melodic lines: it may be meant to evoke a world standing still in wonder but there are more dynamic ways of projecting a sense of interiority. This runs the risk of just being dull. Technically flawless as these performances typically are, a detailed musical response is too often missing or underdrawn: surely the startling chromaticism at 'Crucifixus' in the Mass calls for a sharper differentiation of the semitones at this point (after all, the composer could hardly have signposted his intention more clearly). To get to the point, a beautiful sound is an undeniable achievement, but on its own it cannot render a full account of what this music does or can do. For what it's worth, the concluding Morales *Cum natus esset Jesu* gets closer to what I'd ideally have in mind.

Fabrice Fitch

'Wien'

Benatzky Ich muss wieder einmal in Grinzing sein **Kálmán** Zwei Märchenaugen **G Kreisler** Der Tod, das muss ein Wiener sein^a **Kreuder** Sag beim Abschied leise 'Servus' **Lehár** Lippen schweigen^b **Leopoldi** In einem kleinen Café in Hernals **May** Es wird im Leben dir mehr genommen als gegeben. Heut ist der schönste Tag in meinem Leben **Sieczyński** Wien, du Stadt meiner Träume (Wien, Wien, nur du allein) **Stolz** Im Prater blühen wieder die Bäume. Wien wird bei Nacht erst schön **J Strauss II** Ach, wie so herrlich zu schau'n. Dieser Anstand, so manierlich^b. Draussen in Sievering blüht schon der Flieder. Komm in die Gondel. Sei mir gegrüsst, du holdes Venezia. Wiener Blut, Wiener Blut^b **Weinberger** Du wärst für mich die Frau gewesen **Zeller** Schenkt man sich Rosen in Tirol

Jonas Kaufmann *ten* with

^b**Rachel Willis-Sørensen** *sop* ^a**Michael Rot** *pf*

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / **Adám Fischer**
Sony Classical © 19075 95041-2 (78' • DDD • T/t)



If you're watching the calories, stop reading now. This evocative collection of Viennese

sweetmeats, of wine, women, song and Sachertorte, does not countenance the notion of abstinence. Kaufmann's love affair with Vienna – City of Dreams – was born in the Tyrol (his grandparents' farm) and carried through to operatic stardom. His first professional production was an operetta – Strauss's *A Night in Venice* – and he embraces the style, the timbre, the allure, even the specific accent of this repertoire with complete conviction and self-evident delight.

The great thing about these performances is that they sound 'lived in'. The trick in performing Viennese operetta and Viennese chansons (and this selection has been shrewdly chosen across both) is surely that they don't sound 'artful' but rather that the impression is of their slipping off the vocal chords, spontaneous, relaxed and over-easy. The range here is from numbers born into a cabaret style like Hans May's 'Heute ist der schönste Tag in mein Leben' and Hermann Leopoldi's 'In einem kleinen Café in Hernals' (where Kaufmann might be enjoying a slice of Kardinalschnitte) to the full tenorial voluptuousness of the Korngold version of 'Sei mir gegrüsst, du holdes Venezia' from *A Night in Venice* and 'Zwei Märchenaugen' from Kálmán's *Die Zirkusprinzessin* ('The Circus Princess'), which abounds in *zigeuner* heat and is described by Kaufmann as operetta's answer to *Pagliacci*'s Canio. It's in numbers such as this where one forgets that maybe there were fine details that Kaufmann might have finessed more deftly a few years back, and one is eternally grateful for his beefy, darkening tone.

There is so much to savour here – but above all it's the stylistic understanding (and in this experience and hindsight are invaluable) that carries all before it. There is a oneness, too, with his collaborators – Adám Fischer and the inimitable Vienna Philharmonic, their oft-swooning strings festooning the voice in Robert Stolz's utterly gorgeous 'Im Prater blühen wieder die Bäume'. I love, too, Carl Zeller's 'Schenkt man sich Rosen in Tirol', with its super-catchy chorus, and Weinberger's 'Du wärst für mich die Frau gewesen', where Kaufmann's seductive head-voice is sexily shadowed by solo violin. By contrast, we are in darker Kurt Weill territory with the despondent, really bittersweet Hans May number 'Es wird im Leben dir mehr genommen als gegeben'.

Oh, and fear not, Lehár's Widow waltzes in (along with soprano Rachel Willis-Sørensen) for 'Lippen schweigen', one of the very great tunes, one for the ages – all ages. **Edward Seckerson**

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Mark Pullinger**'s point of departure is ...

Puccini's La bohème (1895)

Wander Montmartre Cemetery, one of the largest in Paris, and you'll find the graves of Alexandre Dumas *fil*s and Henri Murger just a stone's throw apart. Their writing inspired two great operatic heroines felled by consumption in 19th-century Paris: Violetta and Mimì. Whereas Verdi's Violetta (*La traviata*) lives the life of a high-society courtesan, Puccini's Mimì scrapes a living as a seamstress.

Based on Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (a series of vignettes portraying young bohemians living in the Latin Quarter), Puccini's opera *La bohème* brings the characters vividly to life. It had its premiere in Turin in February 1896, and is (along with *La traviata*) easily among the most performed operas in the repertoire – and deservedly so. The four musical journeys that follow take Tullio Serafin's classic recording with Renata Tebaldi and Carlo Bergonzi as their bohemian starting point.

● Bergonzi *sop* Tebaldi *ten* Bastianini *bar* Cesari *bass* Siepi *bass*
Santa Cecilia Academy Chorus and Orchestra / Serafin (Decca, 12/59)

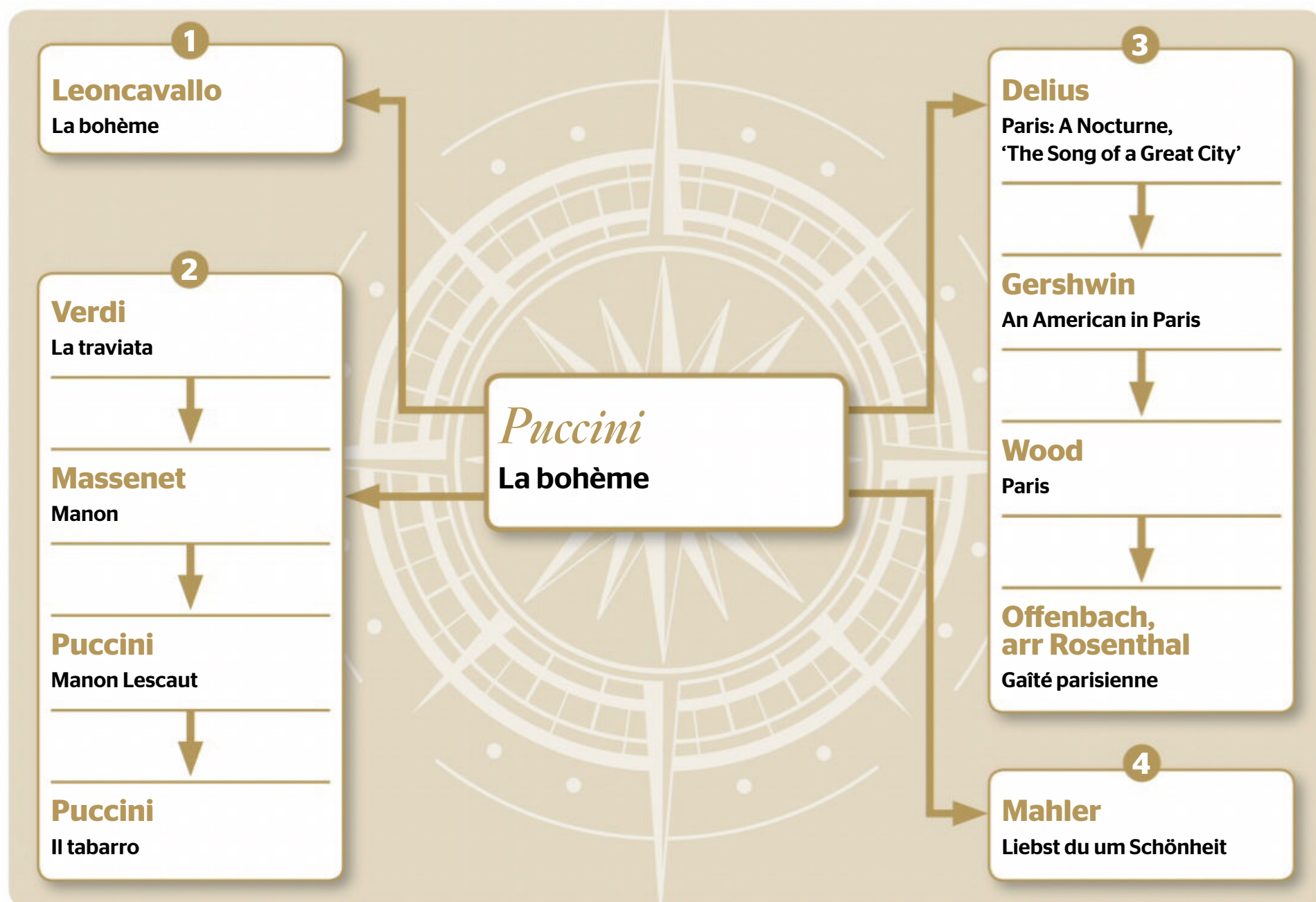
1 *The other bohème*

Leoncavallo *La bohème* (1897) This operatic setting was composed at the same time as Puccini's. Indeed, Leoncavallo claims to have shown Puccini his libretto, who then pinched the idea. Puccini's response to the dispute was unrepentant: 'Let him compose, and I will compose. The public will judge.' Although Leoncavallo's opera received a successful premiere, it all but disappeared from the repertoire, which is a shame, for it contains some fine music, especially for Rodolfo (a baritone here, whereas Puccini's is a tenor).

● Weikl *bar* Popp *sop* Milcheva *mez* Bonisolti *ten* Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Wallberg (Orfeo, 8/88)

2 *Paris, mon amour*

Verdi *La traviata* (1853) If you love *La bohème*, you'll love this. The similarities are striking, but whereas Puccini's opera is set around



60 years earlier, Verdi (basing his on Dumas's *La dame aux camélias*) set a contemporary subject, which was extremely daring for the time (although the Venetian censors demanded it be set in the 17th century, 'in the era of Richelieu', much to Verdi's consternation). Violetta is one of the most challenging roles in the soprano repertoire, requiring dazzling coloratura, lyrical ease and *spinto* power.

● Netrebko *sop* Villazón *ten*
Hampson *bar* Vienna
Philharmonic / Rizzi (DG, 12/05)

Massenet *Manon* (1883)

Massenet's *Manon* has a good deal more charm than Puccini's slightly later setting (below), creating a glittering portrait of the Parisian belle époque. It also includes more of Abbé Antoine-François Prévost's story (*L'histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut*), including Manon's steamy seduction of Des Grieux (at this point an abbé) at St Sulpice.

● Gheorghiu *sop* Alagna *ten*
La Monnaie Chorus and
Symphony Orchestra / Pappano
(Warner Classics, 10/00)



Watercolour (anon, 1905) of a scene from Puccini's opera *La bohème*, whose characters are brought vividly to life by the composer

Puccini *Manon Lescaut* (1892) Set mostly in Paris (until the heroine is deported for prostitution), *Manon Lescaut* is Puccini's often glamorous opera based on the Abbé Prévost's novel about the young ingénue who falls in love with the penniless Chevalier des Grieux, but is corrupted by material wealth.

● Freni *sop* Domingo *ten* Bruson *bar* Royal Opera House Chorus;
Philharmonia / Sinopoli (DG, 12/84)

Puccini *Il tabarro* (1916) An even seamier side of Parisian life is conjured up in *Il tabarro* ('The Cloak'), the brooding, sweaty first opera in *Il trittico*. Puccini was a brilliant orchestrator, heard here in the evocative dusk over the Seine, tugboats honking, before the barge-owner Michele discovers his wife is having an affair with one of his stevedores.

● Merrill *bar* Tebaldi *sop* Del Monaco *ten* Maggio Musicale Fiorentino
Chorus and Orchestra / Gardelli (Decca, 12/62)

3 *Orchestral views of the City of Light*

Delius *Paris: A Nocturne, 'The Song of a Great City'* (1899) Delius loved Paris (he met his wife there), and his four-movement nocturne paints an evocative picture of the French capital from nightfall, through the vigorous night-time café and cabaret culture, until the city reawakens. It's rarely performed in concert, but Sir Andrew Davis is the latest in a long line of advocates going back to Beecham.

● Royal Scottish National Orchestra / A Davis (Chandos, 11/12)

Gershwin *An American in Paris* (1928) Gershwin was another composer who spent time living in Paris, and his work is fuelled by

jazz and the high spirits of the 1920s. In his efforts to depict the bustle of the city, he even brought back four Parisian taxi horns for the premiere in New York.

● New York Philharmonic / Tilson Thomas (Sony Classical, 2/77)

Wood *Paris* (1935) The first movement of Haydn Wood's three-movement suite, *Paris*, is an evocation of the city's gangster underworld. Elsewhere, Wood takes on a light-music spin around the Tuileries Garden and a steep ascent up to Montmartre, the throbbing heart of Parisian cabaret.

● Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra / Tomlinson (Marco Polo, 8/97)

Offenbach (arr Rosenthal) *Gaîté parisienne* (1938) Paris is at its naughtiest in Manuel Rosenthal's arrangement of Offenbach melodies for Léonide Massine's ballet of flirtations – and flashes of knickers in the scandalous, high-kicking cancan from Offenbach's 1858 comic opera *Orphée aux enfers*, which is itself an evocation of another type of Paris underworld.

● Boston Symphony Orchestra / Ozawa (DG, 3/89)

4 *If you love for love*

Mahler *Liebst du um Schönheit* (1902) In *La bohème*, Mimì leaves her rich viscount to return to die with her penniless poet. That sentiment of loving for neither beauty, youth nor riches evokes Friedrich Rückert's tender poem, which Mahler set in 1902.

● Barton *mez* Zeger *pf* (Delos, 2/17)

Available to stream at Apple Music

Opera



Mike Ashman on a Western Australian *Tristan und Isolde*:

'Stuart Skelton is now an experienced *Tristan* and brings the role back to his home country with especial fluency' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 120**



Alexandra Coghlan hears the latest album from Jakub Józef Orliński:

'The gentle lyricism and clean lines of Predieri's music suit Orliński's soft-grained voice well' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 121**

Gervais

Hypermnestre

Katherine Watson *sop* Hypermnestre

Mathias Vidal *ten* Lyncée

Thomas Dolié *bar* Danaüs

Chantal Santon-Jeffery *sop* An Egyptian

Manuel Núñez Camelino *ten* An Egyptian

Juliette Mars *mez* Isis

Philippe-Nicolas Martin *bar* The Nile/Ghost

Purcell Choir; Orpheus Orchestra /

György Vashegyi

Glossa © ② GCD924007 (146' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



If Stephen Fry is planning a third volume of Greek legends, to follow

Mythos and *Heroes*, he might balk at including the grim story of Danaos, king of Argos, and his daughter Hypermnestre. In the mid- to late 18th century, Metastasio's libretto on the subject (under the title *Ipermestra*, without the 'n') was to be set by several composers, from Hasse to Paisiello. It was a toned-down version, with the inevitable happy ending; but the violent original resurfaced, in all its horror, in Salieri's *Les Danaïdes*.

Charles-Hubert Gervais (1671-1744) belongs to that generation of opera composers including Charpentier, Campra and Destouches – all neglected till recently – who were active between the death of Lully and the emergence of Rameau. *Hypermnestre*, his third *tragédie en musique*, was premiered at the Paris Opéra in November 1716, to a libretto by Joseph de La Font. It was given again the following year, with a new last act to words by Simon-Joseph Pellegrin (later to be the librettist for Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*); there were four more revivals up to 1766, after which the opera disappeared. That this recording from Budapest came about is due to a considerable amount of editorial work – including the provision of inner parts for the chorus and orchestra – by the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles,

whose director, Benoît Dratwicki, provides an informative booklet note.

The opera begins with a Prologue: but this is no sycophantic Lullian extolling of the unnamed Hero, the Sun King. Louis XIV had died the year before and France was now led by a regent, Philippe d'Orléans, who employed Gervais as his *maître de musique*. La Font's libretto – highly thought of at the time – sets the Prologue by the Nile, the pyramids in the distance. Supported by the river itself, the Egyptians hold games in honour of Isis; the goddess appears, proposing to restore peace by ordering the union of Hypermnestre, daughter of Égyptus, and Lyncée, son of Danaüs.

The action then moves to Argos, whither Danaüs had fled after being expelled by his brother Égyptus (who doesn't appear in the opera). He intends to marry his 50 daughters to the 50 sons of Égyptus; but in seizing the throne he killed the king, Gélanor, whose ghost tells him that he will be assassinated by one of his sons-in-law. To avert this, Danaüs instructs his daughters to murder the 50 husbands. Hypermnestre alone refuses, but she is torn between love for Lyncée and the oath she unwittingly swore to Danaüs.

Her father gets his comeuppance, of course, and Lyncée gets both bride and throne. But Danaüs is an interesting character, wracked by guilt and remorse as well as being determined to avoid his punishment. Thomas Dolié is gripping in the monologue after his confrontation with the ghost – a solemn Philippe-Nicolas Martin, with stabbing repeated notes in the orchestra. Danaüs has something in common, perhaps, with Claudius in *Hamlet*. Mathias Vidal's Lyncée is believably horror-struck when Hypermnestre reveals the plot and tries to kill herself (more stabbing notes in the orchestra). Katherine Watson could sound a bit more engaged when thunder announces the murder of her new brothers-in-law ('Dieux! ô Dieux! Quelle barbarie!' they sing, offstage), but on the whole she is well into the part, with some nice runs

on 'volez' (disc 1, track 37). There's excellent support from Santon-Jeffery, Camelino and Mars.

The performance follows the first revival, with some additions from 1728 and – by François Rebel – 1765; and the recording includes the two quite different versions of Act 5, from 1717 and 1716. György Vashegyi keeps it all together with style. There's an attractive minor-key *passacaille* for flute and strings. It may be that we will have to wait a long time before seeing this very accomplished work on stage; but someone could make a beautiful suite out of the manifold dances. **Richard Lawrence**

Gluck

Orfeo ed Euridice (1762 Vienna version)

Iestyn Davies *countertenor* Orfeo

Sophie Bevan *sop* Euridice

Rebecca Bottone *sop* Amore

La Nuova Musica / David Bates

Pentatone © PTC5186 (89' • DDD)

Recorded live at St John's Smith Square, London, May 2018

Includes libretto and translation



This is the first version of Gluck's opera, composed for Vienna in 1762, complete on

one CD: not quite penny plain, as David Bates has included the 'Dance of the Blessed Spirits' from the Paris version of 1774. It comes from Pentatone, *Gramophone's* 2019 Label of the Year, and it's very fine. It's hard to believe that it was recorded live, as there's not a peep from the audience: no coughing, no applause.

I wish the booklet had named the singers and players of La Nuova Musica. The chorus has much to do, and I lost count of the number of times it ravished the ear. When the lament that opens the opera returns, it has a greater urgency. Similarly, the Furies' first chorus is given extra momentum by the crescendo at the repeat of 'sull'orme d'Ercole e di Piritoo'. When the spirits finally take pity on Orfeo, their



Ravishing on the ear: Sophie Bevan and Iestyn Davies are magnificent in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* with La Nuova Musica and David Bates

hushed singing gives way to a marvellous intensity in another crescendo before the music dies away. When the Blessed Spirits announce the arrival of Euridice the pastoral lightness is just right. I couldn't detect any difference between the first time's *Andantino* and the second's *Allegretto* – which presumably implies a slightly faster tempo – but no matter.

The orchestra, too, is extremely accomplished. There's a delightful hint of portamento in the introduction to the first chorus (and again in the postlude). The horns are splendidly prominent, both in the 'orribile sinfonia' to Act 2 and in the *minore* sections of the second Ballo at the end. The dances are all played with fire or grace, as appropriate; and the flute, oboe and cello obbligatos in 'Che puro ciel' are beautifully phrased and perfectly balanced. (The recording producer is *Gramophone's* Jonathan Freeman-Attwood.)

The soloists are magnificent. Iestyn Davies sings smoothly throughout, hitting top Ds and Es with no sense of strain. He could show a greater sense of wonder when entering the Elysian Fields, but his grief in Act 1 and his encounter with the Furies are vividly conveyed. 'Che farò' is restrained, quite reasonably: it's the Paris version that has the more emphatic, desperate conclusion. Euridice appears only in Act 3.

Sophie Bevan comes across powerfully, getting more and more stropky as she rails at Orfeo for not looking at her. Rebecca Bottone has a perfect voice for Amore (Cupid), light and bright. 'Gli sguardi trattieni' is taken more slowly than usual: the tempo suits the words but not, I think, the tune.

High praise, then, for David Bates and his ensemble. This is a serious rival to the excellent Sony recording conducted by Frieder Bernius, with Michael Chance, Nancy Argenta, the Stuttgart Chamber Choir and the Canadian orchestra Tafelmusik. **Richard Lawrence**

Selected comparison:

Bernius (8/92) (SONY) ➔ SX2K48040

Handel

Rodrigo

Erica Eloff *sop* Rodrigo
Fflur Wyn *sop* Esilena
Anna Dennis *sop* Florinda
Jorge Navarro Colorado *ten* Giuliano
Leandro Marziotte *counterten* Fernando
Russell Harcourt *counterten* Evanco
Göttingen Festival Orchestra / Laurence Cummings

Accent ③ ACC26412 (168' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Deutsches Theater, Göttingen, Germany, May 17, 2019

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Handel the stage composer was not quite the finished article when he

composed *Rodrigo* for Florence in the autumn of 1707. Potentially strong dramatic situations can go begging in a tale of lust and ambition that centres on the ruthless, over-sexed Castilian King Rodrigo, callously betraying both his devoted wife and his pregnant mistress. Doubtless pressed for time (when wasn't he?), Handel lifted many of the arias from his Roman cantatas, with casual regard for character and dramatic context. Don't look here for the musical and psychological subtleties of Handel's finest London operas. Yet at its best, the music of *Rodrigo* has an invigorating freshness, its raw, sometimes gawky energy tempered by an Italianate melodic suavity that Handel had honed in his cantatas.

Two decades ago *Rodrigo* was well served by its first recording, directed by Alan Curtis. Without necessarily eclipsing it, this new version, taken from a performance at last summer's Göttingen Handel Festival, has many of the advantages of live recording and

a few of the drawbacks – occasional rocky ensemble, intermittent stage clatter. Laurence Cummings directs his expert band of Handelians with more theatrical flair and rhythmic brio than Curtis; and the recitatives, sensibly pruned (uncut they can seem interminable), move at a livelier, more natural pace. With one exception, the singing is excellent. Handel cast the unlovely Rodrigo with a high castrato. Cummings uses a soprano. If a deeper-toned, more masculine-sounding mezzo would have made for a better contrast with the two women, Erica Eloff dispatches her extrovert numbers with bravado and softens her tone affectingly when the tyrant improbably morphs into a devoted pussycat. Rodrigo's love song to Esilena, 'Dolce amore', is tender and touching.

The spurned mistress Florinda spends most of the opera baying for vengeance, and who could blame her. From her opening salvo 'Pugneran con noi le stelle', Anna Dennis tears into her bravura solos with terrific gusto, and brings a rueful inwardness to the delicately scored aria 'Fredde ceneri d'amor' that helps make Florinda a more rounded character. Dennis is far preferable to Curtis's wildly over-the-top Elena Cecchi Fedi. As Rodrigo's masochistically long-suffering wife Esilena, Fflur Wyn is every bit a match for Sandrine Piau on the rival recording, praise indeed. She beautifully catches the mingled agitation and pathos of the superb 'Empio fate' and the grieving tenderness of 'Perchè viva il caro sposo' – one of several arias sadly shorn here of their 'B' section and *da capo* – and is delightfully blithe as she looks to a happy future in the catchy 'Si che lieta'. Wyn's poise and coloratura brilliance even converted me to Esilena's overlong showpiece with violin solo that closes Act 1.

Of the men, Russell Harcourt's strained, squally countertenor is miscast as the rival monarch Evanco, a role written for a female soprano. Tenor Jorge Navarro Colorado, as Florinda's pugnacious brother Count Giuliano, sounds tight and slightly flustered in his opening aria. But he soon warms to the part, impressing both in militaristic swagger (his default mode) and in two lyrical arias, both charming, if out of character.

Handel opera lovers will hardly go wrong with either version of *Rodrigo*. (A third recording, from Eduardo Lopéz Banzo, is too erratically directed and sung to be a front-runner.) Curtis, using his own edition of an opera that contains lacunae (several of Handel's arias are lost), offers more music, especially in

Act 3, and has by far the better Evanco. Against that, Cummings fields the more consistently satisfying cast, and makes the opera more dramatically compelling – the clinching factor for me. **Richard Wigmore**

Comparative versions:

Curtis (7/99) (VIRG/ERAT) 545897-2

Banzo (12/09) (AMBR) AM132

Mussorgsky

Boris Godunov (1869 version)

Alexander Tsymbalyuk *bass* Boris Godunov

Sergei Skorokhodov *ten* Grigory

Mika Kares *bass* Pimen

Alexey Tikhomirov *bass* Varlaam

Maxim Paster *ten* Shuisky

Boris Stepanov *ten* Missail

Johanna Rudström *mez* Feodor

Hanna Husáhr *sop* Xenia

Margarita Nekrasova *mez* Nurse

Okka von der Damerau *mez* Hostess

Vasily Ladyuk *bar* Shchelkalov

Anton Ljungqvist *bass-bar* Mityucha

Gothenburg Opera Chorus; Gothenburg

Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

BIS Ⓢ Ⓜ Ⓢ BIS2320 (125' • DDD/DSD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation

Recorded live at the Gothenburg Concert Hall,

March 2-11, 2017



Confession time. Although it's deeply unfashionable to admire Rimsky-

Korsakov's cosmetic surgery on Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, I admit to loving it. Plushly scored, it's on a lavish scale, full of Russian grandeur as gaudy as the onion domes atop St Basil's Cathedral. Without Rimsky's salvage job, *Boris* wouldn't have gained a foothold in the operatic canon, yet now it ranks as one of the greatest Russian operas. I wouldn't be without André Cluytens's recording (EMI/Warner, 9/63, 6/03) with Boris Christoff taking not just the title-role but also the chronicler-monk Pimen and the vagabond Varlaam for good measure.

However, companies have now largely reverted to Mussorgsky's own sparer, more rugged orchestration and some directors have even adopted the 1869 original, including Richard Jones in his Covent Garden co-production with the Deutsche Oper Berlin. That's the version recorded here by Kent Nagano and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra on BIS, captured in concert in March 2017. It's only the second time it's been recorded, following Valery Gergiev's bumper five-disc set with the Kirov

(Mariinsky) Opera which set down both the 1869 version – rejected by the Imperial Theatres in St Petersburg – and the 1872 revision.

In that revision, Mussorgsky was persuaded to add some love interest – introducing the sumptuous Polish act where the Pretender (Grigory) falls for Princess Marina Mnishek and the political machinations of her Jesuit priest, Rangoni. The composer also altered the sequence of some events and fleshed out female characters such as the Innkeeper and the Nurse, so it's a very different work than originally conceived.

Nagano keeps Mussorgsky's musical argument taut and the playing of the Gothenburg SO is very fine, even if he irons out some of the score's crumpled earthiness. The recording is surprisingly gauzy, with solo voices caught beneath a reverberant halo. With Gergiev, the listener is plunged into the 'bells and smells' of the Coronation scene but Nagano and the BIS engineers keep you at a respectful arm's length. Not that the singing of the Gothenburg Opera Chorus is in any way found wanting – their contributions are among the chief glories of this new set – but I'd like them to have been more to the foreground. The chorus in *Boris* is, frankly, one of the main characters.

Nagano has gathered together an excellent, largely Russian cast, led by Alexander Tsymbalyuk's Boris, his soft-grained, beautiful bass sounding youthful if under-characterised. There are none of Christoff's histrionics, although some may consider that an advantage, nor the vivid word-painting of the gritty bass-baritone Nikolai Putilin for Gergiev. But Tsymbalyuk is moving and sincere.

Mika Kares's sculpted bass makes for a sonorous Pimen, while Sergei Skorokhodov is an excellent Grigory, with a heroic ring to his tenor. Alexey Tikhomirov is suitably rabble-rousing in Varlaam's song about Ivan the Terrible's siege of Kazan and tenor Maxim Paster is an insinuating Shuisky, if not as slippery as the reedy Konstantin Pluzhnikov on the Kirov recording. Boris Stepanov is an eloquent, un-wheedling Holy Fool.

Although the Gergiev recording is preferable, it's only by a slim margin and its availability is tricky (Universal only saw fit to reissue the 1872 version), so if you have a preference for the 1869 ur-*Boris*, then Nagano and the Gothenburgers should suit your requirements rather well.

Mark Pullinger

Selected comparison:

Gergiev (10/98) (PHIL) 462 230-2PH5

Rossini

Il barbiere di Siviglia

Florian Sempey *bar* Figaro
 Catherine Trottmann *sop* Rosina
 Michele Angelini *ten* Almaviva
 Peter Kálmán *bass-bar* Doctor Bartolo
 Robert Gleadow *bass-bar* Don Basilio
 Annunziata Vestri *mez* Berta
 Guillaume Andrieux *bar* Fiorello
 Stéphane Facco *bass* Ambrogio
 Unikanti; Le Cercle de l'Harmonie /
 Jérémie Rhorer

Stage director **Laurent Pelly**

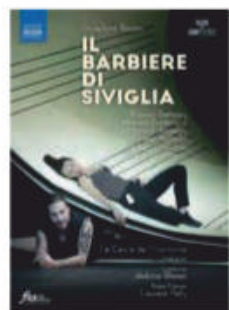
Video director **François Roussillon**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110592; (BD) NBD0065V

(159' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD5.1, DTS5.0 & stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, December 13 & 16, 2017

Includes synopsis



It took a Paris-born theatre director of genius, Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, to give us the definitive filmed staging of the Beaumarchais-Rossini *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. And it has taken another Paris-born theatre director of genius, Laurent Pelly, to strip out the opera's 18th-century setting and reveal the wonder of the modernist comedy that lies beneath.

It was in the 1920s that musicians began recognising the neoclassical nature of Rossini's comic art. First, there was his use of form as the seedbed of wit, a skill mainly learnt from Haydn's instrumental works. Second, there was his debt to *commedia dell'arte* with its use of caricature and mime, and its own bespoke choreography. The wonder of *Il barbiere*, and the reason for its survival as an operatic classic, lies in the skill with which Rossini melded these two disciplines.

Not that I have ever seen this fully realised – until now, and this pitch-perfect telecast of Pelly's own pitch-perfect staging. The experience calls to mind Furtwängler's memory of a performance of *Die Meistersinger* in Bayreuth in 1912 conducted by Hans Richter: 'There was no sense of our being in an opera house. The impression was of a conversation piece, with all the points made as they would be made in a spoken play. One was not conscious of the music, yet the performance took place in so musical an atmosphere that the effect was utterly overwhelming.' It's the same here. One hangs on to the drama's every word, oblivious of the form the 'backing' music is taking, be it aria, duet, *secco* recitative or madcap finale.

'The whole joyous point of *Il barbiere*', Rodney Milnes once remarked, 'is that all the characters are opportunist monsters, which is why, gazing into the proscenium mirror, we all love it so much.' The monster-in-chief, Pelly rightly divines, is the tyrannical (the libretto's word) Dr Bartolo, played in comic caricature with pinpoint precision by the great Hungarian singer-actor Peter Kálmán.

Outwitted by Figaro, and hypnotised by Robert Gleadow's imperturbably seedy Basilio (his Calumny aria brilliantly staged by Pelly), the good doctor gets his ultimate comeuppance from Count Almaviva in a bazooka of a performance by Michele Angelini of 'Cessa di più resistere', the big end-of-opera aria that's usually cut but, as Pelly proves, is crucial to the drama's resolution.

Given that Pelly works with players of quality, while ensuring that the production's every detail is of a piece with itself, it's not surprising that this is a wonderfully well-acted *Il barbiere*, whether played straight or, in a couple of musical divertissements, vaudeville-style with follow-spots.

Florian Sempey's Figaro is a tattooed bruiser in commando boots and a cut-away tailcoat who, swearing by the 'eternal gods', twice makes his entry from above like some *deus ex machina*. Since Dr Bartolo is manifestly the cause of his own downfall, Figaro can happily revert to type as the peripatetic intriguer. Meanwhile, Catherine Trottmann's diminutive Rosina, every inch the alluring teenage troublemaker with her tight black jeans and karate-chop mobility, fights like a ferret in a sack to escape this strange world of deranged old men. Like everyone else, she sings with aplomb from just about every conceivable pose and position.

Music itself is often mentioned in Beaumarchais's *Le barbier de Séville*, a point Rossini seized on with avidity. Hence the use of a musical trope in Pelly's elegantly designed (mainly black-and-white) costumes and sets, as the action is played within and around giant sheets of ivory-coloured music paper. The grilles which guard Bartolo's gated domain resemble staves of music. Amid the mayhem of the Act 1 finale – superbly staged by Pelly – it is folding music stands, not muskets, that are the local militia's weapon of choice.

Rossini learnt his theatre craft as an improvising cembalist, yet I doubt whether even he could have provided a wittier or more pertinent commentary on the action than that conjured up by the matchless Paolo Zanzu.

The final salute, however, must go to Jérémie Rhorer and the period instrumentalists of his Le Cercle de l'Harmonie. Rhorer looks younger than his 46 years, but *premier cru* wines are not made overnight and this, by any measure, is *premier cru* conducting. Verdi praised Rossini's 'truth of declamation' in *Il barbiere*. That's the gold standard by which Pelly's cast operates, yet it takes some doing to follow every twist and turn of conversation, without once allowing us

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Andrea Marcon, Artistic Director



to feel that the Rossini express isn't running smoothly and to time. My, what skills are on display in every department of this astonishing production! **Richard Osborne**

Wagner

Tristan und Isolde

Stuart Skelton *ten*.....Tristan
Gun-Brit Barkmin *sop*.....Isolde
Ain Anger *bass*.....Marke
Boaz Daniel *bass-bar*.....Kurwenal
Angus Wood *ten*.....Melot
Ekaterina Gubanova *mez*.....Brangäne
Paul O'Neill *ten*.....Young Sailor/Shepherd
Andrew Foote *bar*.....Steersman
West Australian Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Asher Fisch

ABC Classics ④ ③ ABC481 8518 (3h 42' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Perth Concert Hall,

August 2018

Includes libretto and translation



Not just a commemoration of a rare local event, this live concert

recording – drawn from two performances and, presumably, rehearsals – is worth preserving, even in a crowded market in which you could now trace, almost unbelievably, over 70 complete recordings.

Let's start with the relative newcomers to Wagnerian adventure. The orchestra here are special because of their obvious knowledge of, and attention to, the drama of the piece. They play like a pit orchestra rather than a symphony orchestra, always listening, always colouring, creating and then running with Wagner's emotional temperature. Much of this seems due to their years spent with Asher Fisch, a Barenboim trainee (we might call him without disrespect) who sounds – in this score that he has revisited regularly – as deeply schooled and in tune as his *pater profundus*.

One word of listeners' warning: if you are addicted to the deep bass orientation of Wilhelm Furtwängler's benchmark of a studio recording (now on Warner and several other multi-generation copies), give yourself time to become acclimatised. The orchestra here intentionally sounds lighter and brighter, yet it contributes every bit as tellingly.

Then there's the Isolde, Gun-Brit Barkmin, called in as a replacement and making apparently her first complete performances of the role. Again, it's a lighter and more feminine voice than we may have regularly heard elsewhere, but her unravelling of the Irish princess's

complex emotional journey is both clear and complete. And, although she's pushed at the points where Isoldes normally are (and always will be), she sounds more completely at home here than in last year's Naxos *Götterdämmerung* (11/18), with a well-calculated degree of controlled sadness alongside the ecstasy of the Liebestod.

Elsewhere all is (mostly) credit. Skelton is now an experienced Tristan and brings the role back to his home country with an especially fluent and detailed portraying of Act 3. The voice meshes well with his Isolde's. Daniel, again a lighter voice than you might find, is refreshingly unhysterical as Kurwenal, perhaps lacking the last degree of master/servant edge that you found in Act 3 from such singers as Hans Hotter. Ain Anger is most impassioned in his mighty Act 2 monologue – no longueurs here in another refreshingly new slant to existing performances – and Gubanova, as often before, makes for a sincere and engaged Brangäne.

The recording is most natural although the chorus's distance away (as per score) might sound strange if you're used to modern stage productions which all show the chorus at the end of Act 1. This is the only moment of slight vocal unease, as the chorus greeting the landing in Cornwall sound inappropriately churchy and formal.

You should have gathered from the above that there is a continuous and credible newness about this performance. It feels like a first-time adventure to all in the best sense. That is undeniably due to the commitment and input of Asher Fisch on the podium, with a performance that keeps pace and heartbeat – and certainly feels quick compared with, say, Bernstein (C Major DVD, 9/18), Karajan (Warner, 7/88) or Thielemann (DG DVD, 9/16) but is never rushed for the sake of it. Well worth investigating, especially if the *Tristans* on your shelf are from long-gone decades. **Mike Ashman**

Benjamin Bernheim

Berlioz La damnation de Faust - Nature immense, impénétrable et fière **Donizetti** L'elisir d'amore - Una furtiva lagrima. Lucia di Lammermoor - Tombe degli avi miei ... Fra poco a me ricovero **Godard** Dante - Ah! de tous mes espoirs ... Tout est fini pour moi sur la terre **Gounod** Faust - Quel trouble inconnu me pénètre? ... Salut! demeure chaste et pure. Roméo et Juliette - L'amour! l'amour! ... Ah! lève-toi, soleil! **Massenet** Manon - Instant charmant ... En fermant les yeux. Werther - Pourquoi me réveiller, ô souffle du printemps?

Puccini La bohème - Che gelida manina!

Tchaikovsky Eugene Onegin - Lensky's Aria

Verdi Luisa Miller - Oh! fede negar potessi ...

Quando le sere al placido. Rigoletto - Ella mi fu

rapita! ... Parmi veder le lagrime. La traviata -

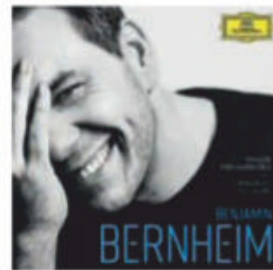
Lunge da lei ... De' miei bollenti spiriti

Benjamin Bernheim *ten*

Prague Philharmonia / Emmanuel Villaume

DG ④ 483 6078GH (63' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Just a matter of months after the release of Palazzetto Bru Zane's recording

of the 1859 *Faust* (11/19), Benjamin Bernheim is back singing 'Salut! demeure chaste et pure' on his debut album for DG, a mixed recital of French, Italian and Russian arias. There's a telling difference, though: on the complete set, he floats tenderly up to the top C and drifts dreamily back down the phrase. Here the top note gets the usual treatment: it's big and impressive and beautifully struck, but the phrase loses shape as he comes off the word 'presence'.

It's perhaps indicative of why the recital as a whole is not quite as rewarding as it might be. Don't get me wrong: Bernheim is a superb singer. The voice is handsome and beautifully regulated, and he sails through this taxing selection with ringing tone, true intonation and a seamless technique – smooth both up and down the range, and horizontally across phrases. It's difficult to imagine many people today, if any, singing these arias better. But at the same time the selection suggests a lack of temperament – without much grain or edge, Bernheim's tenor can feel a little too smooth – and an as yet underdeveloped ability to act with the voice, to convey character and, by extension, elicit sympathy.

We start off, for example, with a slow 'Pourquoi me réveiller' which is impressive, no doubt, but somewhat generalised in its vocal grandeur. As things progress one finds that Bernheim's Nemorino sounds very much like his Duke, his Roméo (giving us a big, *fortissimo* final B flat) much like either of his Rodolfos (*Luisa Miller* or *La bohème*). The attempt to add some repertoire less-trodden with an aria from Benjamin Godard's *Dante*, meanwhile, feels like an afterthought in an otherwise entirely conventional selection.

DG's smooth engineering doesn't help matters, and Emmanuel Villaume's conducting of the Prague Philharmonia is



A Barber of Seville for all time: stage director Laurent Pelly strips out Rossini's 18th-century setting to reveal the modernist comedy beneath – see review on page 119

decent but workmanlike. The booklet essay is little more than a puff piece. Its second sentence talks of 'incomparable charisma ... [Bernheim's] voice gleaming in myriad colours from soft velvet to a diamond-like brilliance'. I'm afraid that's not quite what I hear on this album. **Hugo Shirley**

'Facce d'amore'

Bononcini La costanza non gradita nel doppio amore d'Aminta – Infelice mia costanza. La nemica d'Amore fatta amante – Sinfonia **Boretti** Eliogabalo – Chi scherza con Amor **Cavalli** La Calisto – Erme e solinghe cime ... Lucidissima face. Claudio Cesare – Sinfonia; Crudo amor, non hai pietà **Conti** Don Chisciotte in Sierra Morena – Odio, vendetta, amore **Handel** Agrippina – Otton, qual portentoso fulmine ... Voi che udite. Amadigi di Gaula – Pena tiranna. Muzio Scevola – Spera, ché tra le care gioie. Orlando – Ah stigie larve! ... Vaghe pupille **Hasse** Orfeo – Sempre a si vaghi rai **Matteis** Ballo dei Bagatellieri **Orlandini/Mattheson** Nerone – Che m'ami ti prega **Predieri** Scipione il giovane – Dovrian quest'occhi piangere; Finche salvo è l'amor suo **A Scarlatti** Pirro e Demetrio – Fra gl'assalti di Cupido

Jakub Józef Orliński *countertenor*

Il Pomo d'Oro / Maxim Emelyanychev

Erato (P) 9029 54233-8; (P) (C) 9029 54232-8

(76' • DDD • T/t)



Jakub Józef Orliński made his solo debut a year ago with a collection of sacred works ('Anima sacra' – Erato, 12/18), but for his second recording the Polish countertenor, *Gramophone's* new Young Artist of the Year, steps firmly into the world of the secular with a love-themed recital of arias by composers ranging from Cavalli to Hasse. Once again Orliński has teamed up with the musicologist Yannis François to put together a programme, and once again it's a winner. Alongside the obvious headliners – the mad scene from Handel's *Orlando*, 'Pena tiranna' from his *Amadigi* and Ottone's plaintive 'Voi che udite' from *Agrippina* – are a whole host of little-knowns, including more than a handful of premieres.

There are attractive arias by Bononcini, Boretti and Orlandini but it's music by Luca Antonio Predieri (a near-contemporary of Handel's) that really hits the mark. It's hard not to be charmed by the tripping prettiness of 'Finche salvo è l'amor suo', whose accompanying strings chatter and trill like a forest of

accompanying birds, while the elegant lines of 'Dovrian quest'occhi piangere' (also from *Scipione*) are charged with emotions held close beneath the surface.

Predieri's gentle lyricism and clean lines suit Orliński's soft-grained voice well. He's no convincing bad boy – we get the vulnerability and fragility of Handel's Orlando but never his murderous intensity; and while Orlandini's Nero may command Poppaea to love him in furious volleys of semiquavers and plunging melodic leaps and dives, Orliński gives us only polite requests – but this supple and sweet-toned instrument has plenty to bring elsewhere. Endimione's lovely 'Lucidissime face' yearns and keens with emotion and expression, Ottone frets with exquisite purity (occasionally gripped moments of vibrato aside), and the sustained, legato lines of Bononcini's brooding 'Infelice mia costanza' are beautifully shaped.

Il Pomo d'Oro offer all their usual technicolour support and showmanship under Maxim Emelyanychev. A barnstorming account of Matteis's *Ballo dei Bagatellieri* (complete with castanets) drags the listener on to the dance floor for everything from a lilting chaconne to a frenzied gigue.

Alexandra Coghlan

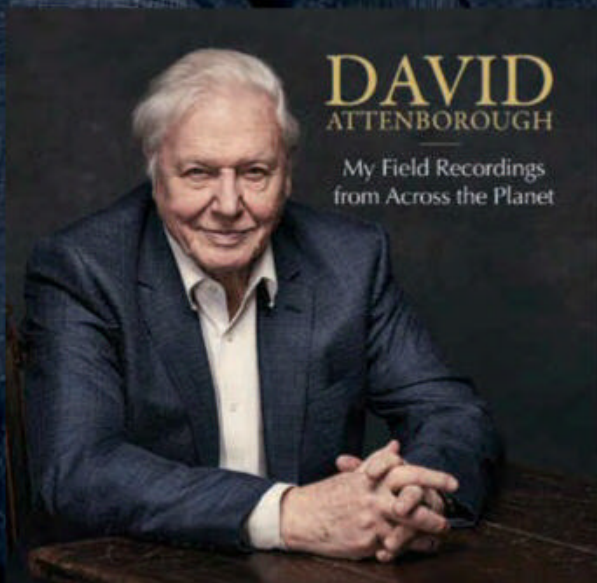
*“While I was theoretically looking for pythons,
in the evenings I would record different types of music...”*

David Attenborough reflects on his time filming *Zoo Quest* between 1954-1963

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

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Eliane Elias

Love Stories

Concord Jazz © CJA00172



On *Love Stories* the siren power of Eliane Elias's voice, the unexpected twists and turns of her piano reharmonisations, coupled with the infinitely subtle orchestral charts of Rob Mathes, combine to produce an album of incredible lyricism and profound musicality. Opening with Frances Lai's 'A Man and a Woman', the eponymous theme from the Oscar-winning 1966 film, the music-making, despite the wide-ranging textural palette, possesses an intimate delicacy, from the subtle bossa reworking of 'Baby, Come to Me' to delectable versions of 'Bonita' and the Sinatra homage, 'Angel Eyes'. The album is sung almost entirely in English, the

exception being a touching take (in Portuguese and English) on 'Little Boat' which features the song's composer, Roberto Menescal, on guitar. The album's three originals, the multi-layered 'The Simplest Things', the anguished 'Silence' – one of the most beautiful vocals that Elias has waxed – and the dreamlike 'The View' serve not only as further proof of Elias's artistic mastery, but also her ability to distil the very deepest emotions with such startling clarity. **Peter Quinn**

Hiromi

Spectrum

Telarc © TEL00081



Hiromi has promised a solo release every decade, so here's the follow-up to *Place to Be*. Her signature sounds remain: the

classical infrastructure, that locked down left hand, her love of Corea's fantasias, her gamin charm steeled with ferocious tempos. She also likes a concept. As you may guess, *Spectrum* is themed around colour, be it the angular opener 'Kaleidoscope' or a romantic take on Lennon and McCartney's 'Blackbird'. There's now a confidence to use space and gentler tones. Hiromi also swings more relaxedly than before. As you'd expect she revs up the Gershwin themes and lush chords, but over the next 20 minutes she breaks it down into various themes and improvisations: she draws deep on Hancock, Jarrett and Corea, while meditating on Coltrane and, um, The Who. And at times she's just Russ Conway, out to entertain and bring a smile to your face. Okay, she's more stylist than innovator, but *Spectrum*, in all its hues, remains her most accessible work.

Andy Robson

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Llio Rhydderch

Sir Fôn Bach

Fflach © CD370H



Llio Rhydderch was moved to arrange 'Anhawdd Ymadael', the penultimate tune of this beautiful album, because the elegy 'Marwnad Dafydd ap Huw, Berach' was possibly sung to it. Dafydd ap Huw died in 1696 and Rhydderch is one of his descendants. The triple harp tradition she has inherited is indeed centuries old, and a rich one. *Sir Fôn Bach* is a collection of tunes reflecting different periods of Rhydderch's life – the Welsh ballads and folk songs she heard in childhood, the cynghanedd (strict metre poetry) and old manuscripts she has researched recently. There is an entrancing elegance to several of the tunes, and an intricacy to the instrumental melodies.

Rhydderch learned by ear, teaches in the same way and is admired for her ability to improvise. Anyone who enjoys the kora music of the griots will appreciate *Sir Fôn Bach*. 'What would I do without my triple harp?' she writes. 'It has opened invaluable creative doors for me and is the muse's messenger.' **Julian May**

Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh & Thomas Bartlett

Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh & Thomas Bartlett

Real World Records © LPRW226



Emerging from The Gloaming's five-strong fold, Hardanger d'amore player Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh and pianist Thomas Bartlett have struck off to make a stunning album of instrumental pieces that sees both players working deep into their

own distinctive terrain and meeting at the heart of it. The album features nine remarkable tracks, with four extending into ten-minute territory, which enables the duo to spread their wings and skilfully negotiate the thermals of inspiration, craft, nuance and improvisation.

They first played as a duo at a studio in Mexico on a Gloaming tour. They were the only ones to turn up. They played for hours, and the nine-minute 'Zona Rosa' and a spectral four minutes of 'The Wanderer' come from those sessions. More emerged from The Wood Room at Real World Studios a year later. The final sessions, which include the improvised soundcheck that is the striking opener, 'Kestrel', were made in New York. It's all live and largely improvised. The dissolving, resolving and reconvening of the music is without hesitation, repetition or restraint, and utterly absorbing. **Tim Cumming**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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Bruno Walter: The Complete Columbia Album Collection

Jed Distler revisits the recorded legacy of one of the 20th century's greatest conductors

Among great conductors of the past, Bruno Walter (1876-1962) was one of the first to receive extensive attention on CD. The revival began in 1985 when Japanese Sony introduced 31 discs covering the extensive series of stereo recordings Walter made in semi-retirement during the last four years of his life. Sony subsequently brought out Walter stereo reissues and multi-disc set editions for the European and American markets, with occasional forays into the label's 78rpm and mono LP Walter holdings. Now, for the first time, Walter's complete Columbia (CBS) catalogue is gathered together under one roof. **Bruno Walter - The Complete Columbia Album Collection's** 77 CDs (retailing for about £230, but available to stream and download individually) are packaged in original LP sleeve replicas, chronologically ordered by each album's date of release. Once again, the producer Robert Russ and his team have knocked themselves out to do this project in the right way. Everything is remastered from the best possible sources, while recording session information is thoroughly vetted. A 203-page hardback book includes an excellent essay by Walter's biographer Erik Ryding, several useful cross-indexed discographies, plus a generous assortment of photos, session logs and old advertisements.

Walter's discography spans nearly 60 years of studio recordings, together with numerous surviving concert and opera broadcasts. Before the Second World War, Walter recorded exclusively in Europe for HMV and British Columbia. With the outbreak of the war, Walter emigrated to the United States, and signed a contract with Columbia Masterworks. Although

Walter never officially accepted a position as the New York Philharmonic's Music Director (he was credited as 'music advisor' from 1947 and 1949), the orchestra still was the one to whom Walter was most closely associated in concert and on disc. After a serious heart attack in 1957, Walter essentially retreated from public performances. However, with the advent of stereo and the enticement of CBS producer John McClure, Walter agreed to remake his core repertory with a hand-picked orchestra drawn from top Los Angeles and Hollywood freelance musicians, in addition to three stereo New York Philharmonic items.

Even in his eighties, nothing gets past Bruno Walter's ears

Walter's stereo recordings, in fact, encompass roughly half of this set's contents, with the remainder covering 1941 to 1956. As such, the collection is necessarily slanted towards Walter's last two decades as a performer. Generally speaking, the lyricism and singing quality that characterise Walter's earlier discs emerge in more disciplined and focused fashion via the CBS sessions. This can be attributed both to Walter's podium presence and the degree to which American orchestras evolved and advanced in the mid-20th century. Let me cite some examples: Walter's HMV 1939 Schubert Ninth with the London Symphony Orchestra doesn't match the strutting brilliance of the collection's 1946 New York Philharmonic version, where the brass section's collective lung power in

the finale far surpasses their very capable British colleagues. The evocations of birdsong in the 1946 Philadelphia Orchestra's Beethoven *Pastoral* second movement convey more joy and disciplined unanimity of ensemble than their thicker 1936 Viennese counterparts. Similarly, the live 1938 Vienna Mahler Fifth Symphony *Adagietto* features genial string portamentos that virtually disappeared by the time Walter recorded the entire symphony in New York in 1947.

In Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (which Walter premiered following the composer's death), musical excellence and historic importance grippingly merge in the 1960 New York Philharmonic recording, much more so than in Walter's highly touted 1952 Decca Vienna version, where neither orchestra nor contralto soloist Kathleen Ferrier rise beyond mediocre. Obviously my harsh evaluation of the latter is not shared by most *Gramophone* readers and critics, yet read my extensive, dissenting prosecution in *The Trial* (Awards issue, 2010). Walter himself disparaged his scrappy live 1938 Vienna Mahler Ninth, but his California stereo remake, though light years better, is rhythmically stiff and contains errors that could easily have been fixed (such as when the bass drum and cymbals enter a bar early in the Rondo-Burleske). In fairness, though, the Ninth had not then become the repertoire staple it is today, whereas the New York mono First and stereo Second proudly stand time's test.

Walter's warm, songful and curvaceous stereo Bruckner Fourth, Seventh and Ninth may strike some listeners as insufficiently epic, especially in the context of emotionally harrowing, darkly lit Bruckner symphony performances that began to emerge in the



Bruno Walter's studio discography spans nearly 60 years

1960s and '70s. On the other hand, the live 1954 New York Seventh never really settles, and suffers from an overly fast and glib *Adagio* and a comparably harried Scherzo. However, the twain unambiguously meets when the music of Brahms connects with Walter's purposeful, lovingly detailed interpretations, and we have the luxury of choice.

The mono New York First and Second symphonies' outer movements crackle with urgency, outclassing the relatively low keyed stereo remakes. Stereophony clarifies the contrapuntal strands in the Fourth's concluding passacaglia better than in the more diffusely engineered yet better executed New York mono reading. Exciting as Walter's fast tempos throughout his New York Third are, the stereo remake remains a version of reference for its sophisticated applications of colour and nuance and miraculous textural organisation. Much as I appreciate the solo contributions of George London and Irmgard Seefried in the *German Requiem*, the drab sound and unfocused choral singing are a liability.

Sound quality particularly factors into the impact of Walter's Beethoven from session to session, although the firmly drawn bass lines and full-throated brass passages that the conductor favoured nearly always make their presence felt. The choice again falls between the stereo symphony cycle's better sound and the more vital and dynamically charged mono interpretations, although, as they say, the devil is in the

detail. In stereo, for example, the Seventh's whirling finale and the Ninth's first-movement opening benefit from more precise and rhythmically steady articulation. The 1941 Fifth's finale erupts without that jarring *Luftpause* that Walter imposed in both subsequent versions. Yet the conductor's stretched-out first movement fermatas certainly grab your attention. In the Violin Concerto with Zino Francescatti, the Columbia Symphony's reduced forces provide more stable and transparent orchestral support than the heavier New York accompaniment supporting Joseph Szigeti. Conversely, for no-holds-barred, big band, 'in-your-face' Beethoven, one might mistake Walter's absolute smoker of an *Egmont* Overture (New York 1954) for Toscanini, or his lean and driving stereo *Leonore* Overture No 2 for vintage George Szell.

While Szell's Mozartian reputation has increased over time, Walter's has declined, probably on account of the fast tempos and hard-hitting sonorities typifying period performance precepts. To a new generation of listeners, Walter's Mozart slow movements might seem overly sonorous and affectionate, but damned if they don't 'flow like oil', in the composer's own words. True, the stereo *Jupiter* Symphony finale ambles and gets more sluggish as it progresses, but the stereo *Haffner* Symphony finale is appreciably crisp and exciting. Something of Walter's effectiveness and flexibility conducting Mozart in the opera house informs his sympathetic support in four

CDs worth of arias respectively featuring Ezio Pinza, Lily Pons, Eleanor Steber and George London, although he's less adroit at the piano as accompanist for Lotte Lehmann's emotive Schumann *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -Leben*.

It's sometimes forgotten that Walter presided over the world-premiere recording of Samuel Barber's First Symphony, a work whose controlled Romanticism fits Walter's temperament to a tee. Some will appreciate Walter's light touch in Richard Strauss's *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung* more than I do (the latter benefits more from Toscanini's haunting intensity and pulverizing climaxes), but if you want brooding with a capital B, the stereo New York Philharmonic Schubert *Unfinished* is on a par with Giulini's similarly spacious Chicago Symphony traversal for DG.

Columbia often recorded the rehearsals preceding Walter's recording sessions, and these all prove fascinating, almost as much as the performances themselves! It is clear that Walter knows exactly what he wants, and obtains results with courtesy, efficiency and the utmost clarity, supported by his thorough knowledge of the scores. Even in his eighties, nothing gets past Walter's ears as he stops the orchestra to adjust dynamics and balances, to align a phrase with the proper accentuation, or to ensure that the dotted rhythms of Beethoven's Fourth's slow movement, or the Ninth's Scherzo, are consistently spot on. Considering all of the praise heaped upon Walter as a 'spiritual' presence and for his 'humanity', the rehearsals further substantiate Walter's inner strength and high standards, as he stood before his musicians wielding an iron hand in a mink glove. **G**



THE RECORDING

Bruno Walter - The Complete Columbia Album Collection

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A celebration of the British string quartet

Richard Bratby welcomes a new Naxos collection played by the Maggini Quartet

It's at moments like this that I wonder if we take Naxos for granted. In 2001 the appearance of, say, a cycle of Bax string quartets, in excellent performances, at budget price seemed little short of miraculous. Those who were around at the time were aware, I think, that something remarkable was under way; the reviews were generally warm. But still, presented like this – a hefty 20-disc box of British string quartets, recorded by the Maggini

Quartet between 1994 and 2009 – the enterprise looks little short of heroic: a 15-year voyage of discovery, unlocking a glorious swathe of largely neglected 20th-century repertoire.

And it is exclusively 20th-century repertoire: the outer limits, chronologically, are Elgar and Malcolm Arnold. From the privileged viewpoint of 2019, it might seem odd that a survey of British string quartets contains no Stanford or Parry. Naxos has also chosen to exclude the Maggini's Maxwell Davies discs; and possibly it was agreed at a planning stage that Tippett and Robert Simpson were well served elsewhere. Personally I'd love to have heard some Daniel Jones. But we can play that game for ever. This is a feast of eminently explorable repertoire in performances which were often the first, and are even more frequently the finest, on record.

If you choose to listen to the discs in the order in which they were recorded (Naxos reproduces the original sleeves, as well as all the original sleeve notes), you can hear just how quickly the (then) youthful Maggini find their voice. I remember the delight with which I first heard their collection of smaller Frank Bridge pieces in 1995, but listening again, the rough-cut freshness which is so engaging in miniatures like *Cherry Ripe* and *Sir Roger de Coverley* doesn't make for particularly reflective performances of larger scale works like the *Noveletten* or the splendid *Phantasie Quartet*.

That slightly bracing quality is offset by a new-found polish in the group's Britten



The Maggini Quartet in its original line-up which recorded the bulk of the Naxos series

cycle, recorded with considerable flair between 1996 and 1997. At times, such as in the contrasted textures of the First Quartet, that flamboyance is an asset. Elsewhere – a ferocious *Simple Symphony*, and a Third Quartet that never quite gets beneath a gleaming surface – it's less persuasive, and given the quality of the competition the Maggini's Britten is perhaps the weakest spot in this collection. Their Elgar, however, is on another level. The String Quartet is racked by Mahlerian angst, and the Piano Quintet (featuring that Brian Blessed of the keyboard, Peter Donohoe) is tremendous: a turbulent, black-toned autumn storm of a reading.

The Maggini find the right sound for each piece without ever compromising their own voice

By the time they returned to Frank Bridge in 2002-3, they were on a roll. The venue, as for the majority of the recordings here, is Potton Hall, Suffolk; the sound is transparent and warm, and the ensemble itself – focusing its sound around Martin Outram's oaky, eloquent viola tone and the ardent but never overbearing first violin of Laurence Jackson – sounds utterly natural. There's a rhythmic buoyancy, a sense of to-and-fro, and an absolute sympathy with the music: a hallmark of so many of these performances. The Maggini find the right sound for each piece without ever compromising their own voice, whether the Brahmsian glow of John Ireland's two

early quartets, the genial warmth of Bax's surprisingly sunny First, or the overcast neoclassicism of William Alwyn.

Be sure to put aside any lazy prejudices about cow-and-gate pastoralism: the range of this music is startling. True, the Maggini play Moeran's two quartets with a tenderness and inward warmth that is surely unlikely ever to be surpassed. But their Vaughan Williams has an appropriately Gallic refinement and urgency,

and their grip on long-range form gives a satisfying tautness to the extended variation-movements of Alan Rawsthorne's three quartets. They focus unsparingly on the icy, Shostakovich-like intensity of Malcolm Arnold's (still hugely undervalued) Second Quartet, and in the two discs of chamber music by Edmund Rubbra (Gina McCormack had by then succeeded Jackson as leader), they find endless half-tones of unsentimental melancholy.

The tenor Charles Daniels matches that subtlety in a marvellously plangent account of Rubbra's *Amoretti*, and it's worth saying that the Maggini have a particular gift for finding sympathetic collaborators (David Campbell, on clarinet, matches the string players colour for colour in Bliss's superb Clarinet Quintet), and for discovering – well, I don't want to call them 'filler' items because gems like Arnold's droll *Vita Abundans*, Bliss's *Conversations* or Bax's *Cathleen-ni-Hoolihan* add greatly to the pleasure of this set. The Maggini treat them with the same commitment that they bring to every piece here, even if Naxos's aim – as ever – was simply to offer value for money. There can be no argument on that front, and this box (retailing for about £41) belongs in the library of anyone who's interested in British music, or the string quartet more widely. It'll certainly open a few ears. **G**

THE RECORDING

British String Quartets

Maggini Qt

Naxos © (20 discs) 8502021

Wilhelm Furtwängler: Complete Recordings on Deutsche Grammophon and Decca

Richard Osborne grapples with the complicated recorded legacy of the great conductor

Furtwängler's recorded legacy has long been a minefield for the uninitiated, and has become more so as company executives who 'knew the field' either retire or die. The glue that holds the inheritance together is the work of the Furtwängler Society's discographer extraordinary John Hunt. The seventh edition of his *The Furtwängler Sound* came out in 2015, though to judge by lapses of annotation in this newest anthology, that's not yet reached Berlin.

It would be splitting hairs to query the word 'complete' in the set's title, since it's only a single 1926 recording that's missing. (Weber's *Freischütz* Overture, available on Naxos and elsewhere.) What the title doesn't explain is that, of the 34 CDs, 13 are wartime radio recordings – often of exceptional quality, though next to nothing to do with Deutsche Grammophon – along with 11 CDs taken from postwar radio recordings to which DG had early publishing rights.

That leaves just 10 discs which relate to actual DG or Decca releases. These include the sacred trinity of post-war DG studio recordings – Haydn's Symphony No 88, Schubert's Ninth and Schumann's Fourth – alongside Furtwängler's 1951 Berlin account of his own Second Symphony, a studio recording that served well enough until Orfeo released his live 1953 Vienna performance. As to the three-disc Decca contribution, this is as small as it's problematic.

The first three CDs are given over to recordings made between 1929 and 1937 by DG's predecessor company Polydor. Here the technical and musical qualities veer between the insupportable (brutally Germanic Rossini) and the entirely wonderful (a 1929 *Till Eulenspiegel* and a 1937 account of the *Fledermaus* Overture that would have made even Carlos Kleiber gaze).

Furtwängler's 1926 recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, made with Polydor's fallible 'beam of light' process, is included as a 'bonus' disc. The performance is striking, but with double basses and drum often inaudible in

pianissimo it's no match for Furtwängler's peerless 1937 HMV studio version.

By 1942 German radio was recording onto 30ips [inch per second] iron-oxide tape. Hence the generally excellent piano sound on Furtwängler's 1942 recording of the Schumann Piano Concerto with Walter Gieseking as soloist. We probably think of Gieseking as a bit of a cool customer but with Furtwängler driving the performance, he emerges as a pianist of power and expressive range. (Claudio Arrau said that playing the Schumann with Furtwängler was pure heaven.) Equally, no musician has breathed more life into Schumann's late Cello Concerto as Furtwängler does with Tibor de Machula, the 30-year-old Hungarian-born cellist whom he had invited to become Principal Cello of the Berlin Philharmonic six years earlier.

Where Furtwängler and politics are concerned an ounce of example is worth a ton of generality.

As you might expect, Bruckner is well done by, beginning with a speedy, no-holds-barred 1942 Bruckner Fifth: a marvellous act of narrative retelling, caught in good quality sound. Also included are the two famous, audience-free radio recordings of Bruckner's Eighth and Ninth symphonies made with the Vienna Philharmonic in the autumn of 1944 (though not the equally revered 1944 Beethoven *Eroica* from that same series). The post-war Bruckner recordings include a notable Berlin Philharmonic Bruckner Seventh. Less agreeable are two Vienna Philharmonic concert performances of the Fourth Symphony in the cut and partly re-orchestrated Loewe/Schalk edition to which Furtwängler was addicted. The first was recorded by DG in Stuttgart in October 1951, the second recorded by Decca a week later in Munich.

Such 'completeness' can be a curse. And there's more, since the set includes two versions of the conceptually superb June 1943 Beethoven Fourth: one live with an

audience, the other (much to be preferred) without. That said, both accounts of the Fifth Symphony are worth anthologizing: ablaze in 1943, a touch more dogmatic on the occasion of Furtwängler's return to Berlin in 1947, where the finale sounds as if it's been conceived as the ceremonial trampling underfoot of the lately vanquished regime. The same occasion also produces an unforgettable account of the *Egmont* Overture.

The only instrumental works by Mozart regularly programmed by Furtwängler were *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, the K361 wind serenade, and the late G minor Symphony (No 40). All were supremely well done, as was Symphony No 39 on the rare occasions he conducted it. But, again, do we need both wartime recordings? The gem is the one taken from that same audience-free radio concert on October 7, 1944, which ended with Bruckner's Ninth. But beware: the booklet lists this incorrectly as dating from '1942-43'.

Furtwängler's way with the César Franck Symphony was long on foreboding, short on impetus. It sounds well enough in this 1953 Decca recording. But why dig out the technically deficient January 1945 Vienna recording, other than as a memento of Furtwängler's final concert before his flight to Switzerland?

Where Furtwängler and politics are concerned an ounce of example is worth a ton of generality. Witness this live performance of Richard Strauss's *Symphonia domestica* recorded in 1944, at the start of the composer's 80th-birthday year. The Nazis had decreed that the birthday should be ignored, a ruling Furtwängler advised was both indefensible and ill-advised. The Berlin Philharmonic had played the work under Strauss but this Furtwängler performance is one of his most impassioned, displaying all the wit and humanity that invariably made his *Till Eulenspiegel* unmissable. The sound is first-rate.

Furtwängler's defence of Hindemith in the 1930s gives his 1947 performance of the Weber-inspired *Symphonic Metamorphoses* a certain interest but

the performance itself is dutiful rather than revealing. Similarly this live 1947 Berlin account of Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, a somewhat frenetic affair preserved in substandard sound before a restless audience, is no match for the musically superior studio recording Karajan was making with the Vienna Philharmonic that very same week.

The following March, Furtwängler was invited to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra on a brief English tour. During the visit, Decca took them into Kingsway Hall to record Brahms's Second Symphony: an orchestrally fallible performance that nonetheless moves, glows, and exults. There is, however, serious discoloration/distortion in the third movement's first 32 bars. Since this wasn't cited in early reviews and isn't present on Ward Marston's 2008 Naxos transfer, I can only conclude that the present transfer has been poorly monitored.

Furtwängler was a great Brahms conductor but the Brahms input here is not strong. There are two versions of the Second Symphony, a late Berlin Third whose sound is badly awry on the final page (Audite's transfer is much to be preferred), and no Fourth.

Where the music of Tchaikovsky and Sibelius was concerned, Furtwängler, like Karajan, refused to bow to prejudices fed by Germany's shifting military alliances or, more generally, to Austro-German public taste. Sadly, the only Tchaikovsky here is a performance of the *Pathétique* – passionate, profound, endlessly eloquent – recorded in Cairo in 1951. It would match Furtwängler's 1938 HMV studio recording were it not for a clunkily played and clunkily recorded third-movement march. Sibelius is represented by an atmospheric wartime *En saga*.

The 76-page booklet disappoints. Aside from the occasional dating error, it gives no help whatsoever to non-German speakers concerning a fascinating rehearsal sequence and 45 minutes of Furtwängler talking on an array of musical topics.

The rehearsal relates to Furtwängler's captivating 1929 recording of Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*. The first section (figs 16-24) covers the amorous interlude and the meeting with the pedagogues; the second (fig 26 to shortly after fig 28) concerns what is compositionally one of the most intriguing sequences in the score. This is not an episode but a shadowy, allusive transition towards the work's denouement. Ever the master of the musical transition, Furtwängler rehearses this with a touch that's as vigilant as it's deft.



Wilhelm Furtwängler, rehearsing in Hamburg in 1954

As for the talks, I know for certain that DG holds English-language transcripts of many of these. Here, though, there is not so much as a simple précis. This is a pity given how rich the talks are in insight and good humour. Gems include a pricelessly accurate assessment of the unreformed Royal Albert Hall acoustic, and such timeless observations as 'young conductors, in particular, seem to think that the music will be fiery if they themselves are fiery'. And did Hans Richter (whose last Bayreuth *Die Meistersinger* Furtwängler vividly recalls) conduct the famous prelude with the same free-flowing rapture Furtwängler does in this 1949 Berlin account? Alas, we can never know.

One bonus which we can enjoy is a good DVD reprint of Paul Czinner's film of the 1954 Salzburg Festival staging of *Don Giovanni*, not least because the overture allows us to see Furtwängler conducting. How the music dances and sings under a beat that's wonderfully clear – yes, clear! – and finely sprung, without the 'click of an attack', to use Walter Legge's useful phrase about Karajan's own intrinsically musical beat.

A real curate's egg of a box, then. If individual items are of interest, consult the readily available seventh edition of Hunt's *The Furtwängler Sound* to find notes on alternative transfers on labels such as Audite, Chibas, Naxos, and Pristine Classics. Meanwhile, when will Warner Classics get round to giving us 'Furtwängler: The Complete HMV Recordings', a fabulous legacy that carries with it far fewer problems of sourcing and annotation? **G**



THE RECORDING

Wilhelm Furtwängler Complete Deutsche Grammophon & Decca Recordings
DG ⑤ ⑧ (34 discs + **DVD**) 4837288

BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan offers up a selection of CD bargains, from legacy boxes to inventive compilations

Last year I welcomed **Sir Neville Marriner's** Legacy for Capriccio (separate boxes of recordings from London and Stuttgart), and now Hänssler Classic have come up with a collection of concerto recordings with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the highlights surely being a quartet of Mozart piano concerto performances (Nos 20, 23-25) with an acutely responsive Ivan Moravec. The Grieg, Rachmaninov Second and Tchaikovsky First concertos are treated to wholesomely romantic reportage by Garrick Ohlson; and there are the violin concertos: Dmitry Sitkovetsky in the Mendelssohn, Brahms and Sibelius concertos, all very well played but in general more reliable than especially inspired, and Pamela Frank offering an excellent Bruch First. Marriner's accompaniments are superb. Incidentally, you'll need to know your opus numbers to confirm that the Brahms Violin Concerto is actually included as part of the deal: it sits beneath the Mendelssohn on disc 5 as simply 'Op. 77 in D major'. Brahms's actual name is mentioned neither on the box nor in the booklet.

More persuasive concerto recordings arrive courtesy of **Vladimir Feltsman: The Complete Columbia Album Collection**, especially Tchaikovsky's Piano Concertos Nos 1 and 3 with the National SO under Mstislav Rostropovich, the latter given with both energy and finesse. Also included are Rachmaninov's Third and *Paganini* Rhapsody under Zubin Mehta, and Prokofiev's First and Second Concertos under Michael Tilson Thomas. In the solo works programmed, Feltsman is impressive in music that demands crisp fingerwork (for example, Chopin's gnomic Prelude in G, Op 28 No 3), and while his playing is in general very sympathetic, I'd say that his later recordings for Nimbus reveal deepened sensibilities.

It would be hard to find one whose musical instincts are truer or more reliable than those of the conductor Sir Andrew Davis on Warner's celebrated series **The British Line**. Included are Elgar's



two symphonies, Vaughan Williams's nine (plus *Job* and other works), works by Delius (including a superb *Paris*), Holst (*The Planets*, *Egdon Heath*) and Tippett, more Elgar, and as a bonus, the Last Night of the Proms, 100th season. Davis's finest quality is his ability to draw you in without too much point-making. His musical judgement is impeccable, and in a work like Elgar's Symphony No 2 he has the ability to draw a tear or two as well. The BBC SO's playing is excellent and the recordings are superb. As British music 'starter packs' go, you could hardly do better (though one mustn't forget Vernon Handley – especially his Classics for Pleasure set of Vaughan Williams symphonies).

As to the Russian symphonic tradition, Alto has treated us to an invaluable 'limited edition' package of all 27 Myaskovsky symphonies plus a handful of shorter works. And if Davis, Handley and Sir Adrian Boult fly a high flag for British music, **Evgeny Svetlanov** was Russian music's high priest. This particular set was the crowning glory of his work in the studio, the playing dedicated and often thrilling, the music itself hugely varied, both in tone and scale – an approximate blend of Shostakovich, Scriabin and Reger. It was the much-missed Francis Wilson's pioneering Olympia label that first brought

these recordings to our attention, and it's wonderful to see them re-emerge in the present context. There's so much to savour. Just this morning I was listening to the Fourth Symphony (1918), which opens to a mournful solo flute line, soon joined by clarinets before a more tempestuous mood sets in. And is there much other Russian orchestral music of the period that's as deeply affecting as the beginning of the second movement: *Largo, freddo e senza espressione?* The cycle starts in 1908 (the First Symphony, revised in 1921) and ends in 1949, the year before the composer's death. Think of what else was going on in Russian music during that 31-year period –

including Stravinsky's humorously acerbic *The Soldier's Tale* (1918) and Prokofiev's lyrical Cello Sonata (1949) – then turn to the sheer consistency of Myaskovsky's deeply serious, big-boned style and the contrast is remarkable. One or two symphonies achieved relative popularity (the concise one-movement No 21 was recorded by both Eugene Ormandy and Morton Gould), but familiarity is hardly the issue. What matters most is the abundance of musical quality on offer.

If you love Joseph Haydn then you're bound to gravitate to his brother Michael's best work

And that's not it for quality Russian fare. The complete chamber music of Sergey Taneyev featuring the **Taneyev Quartet** and supporting artists has recently appeared on the Northern Flowers label. Best known perhaps is the Piano Quintet (completed in 1906), here with pianist Eliso Virsaladze, the magnificent third-movement *Largo* surely an inspiration for the slow movements of Shostakovich's Piano Trio No 2 and Piano Quintet. Also included are Taneyev's piano quintet, two string quintets, a piano trio, three string trios,

a violin sonata and nine sizeable string quartets. It's possible to gauge the breadth and range of Taneyev's style just by listening to the first two CDs: Quartet No 1, on disc 1, is a warm, impassioned work, dedicated to one of Taneyev's most trusted friends, Tchaikovsky; and on disc 2, there's the Fifth Quartet, whose opening is the epitome of musical innocence – bright, tuneful and with a Haydnesque elegance. At 23 minutes it's one of the shorter works in the cycle; a couple of the others play for in excess of 39 minutes. But listening to these works is time well spent. Both of these unmissable Russian sets are exceedingly well annotated.

Perhaps the greatest claim to fame for **Michael Haydn** (other than being Joseph's younger brother, of course) is his stirring Requiem 'Missa pro defuncto Archiepiscopo Sigismondo', the 1772 premieres of which were attended by both Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his father Leopold. In fact, so influenced was Wolfgang Amadeus that when Süssmayr came to fill in the gaps of Mozart's own Requiem after the composer's death he knew precisely which roads to follow. I mention all this because it would be quite easy to miss Haydn's 'Missa' in the contents of Brilliant Classics' admirable 'Michael Haydn Collection'. I can however assure you that it is there on CD 15, in a fine performance under Helmut Rilling. Eight of the 28 discs are devoted to 'sacred choral works', including a C minor Requiem attributed to Michael Haydn but that was in fact written by Georg von Pasterwitz. I was especially taken with the *Te Deum* (CD 17) which, like Joseph's, clocks up a timing of less than 10 minutes. There are three discs' worth of extremely rare opera and Singspiel (none of them to be found in the 2000 edition of *The New Kobbé's Opera Book*), concertos and concertinos (three CDs, including the violin concertos played by Barnabás Kelemen), three discs of divertimentos, nocturnos and a serenade, seven discs' worth of symphonies, and four discs of chamber music (quartets, the complete string quintets, and chamber divertimentos). Generally speaking, all the music is extremely listenable – performing standards measure up, and so do the recordings. If you love Joseph then you're bound to gravitate to his brother's best work.

It's not often that I'm irritated by the advertising blurb on CD boxes but when Naxos claims that its 'essential' [sic] **Choral Collection** 'presents the greatest choral masterpieces' [my italics] in critically acclaimed performances' I have to raise an objection. Not with respect to performance

standards, which are often excellent ... But the greatest choral masterpieces? With no *St Matthew Passion*, *St John Passion*, B minor Mass, *Missa solemnis*, Schubert E flat Mass or Verdi Requiem, to name but a handful? Still, having got that off my chest, there's plenty to celebrate here, not least sterling performances by Oxford Camerata under Jeremy Summerly (including Bach's *Magnificat*, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Fauré's Requiem and other choral pieces, and a fine Hildegard CD), Antoni Wit's memorable recordings of Dvořák's Requiem and Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* and *Sinfonietta*, and Cherubini's C minor Requiem under the excellent Diego Fasolis, coupled with an imposing *Marche funèbre*. There's also plenty of early music, and rarities by Donizetti and Simon Mayr, as well as contemporary works by Penderecki, Pärt, Rutter and Kim André Arnesen. And that's not the half, or even the quarter of it. So my initial moan notwithstanding, a useful collection, more valuable for what's relatively unusual than for what isn't.

In Bru Zane's offering, the skill of the planning and the appeal of the listening whet the appetite for more

Still, Brilliant Classics' 14-CD collection **Magnificat: The Song of Mary Through the Ages** represents superior planning all round, this time being precisely 'what it says on the tin'. Who could resist the exhilarating opening movement of CPE Bach's *Magnificat* in D under Hartmut Haenchen or the uplifting opening of Stanford's *Magnificat* for double choir in B flat under Jeremy Backhouse? (The *Magnificat* of 'Edward' [sic] Rubbra, though, under Christopher Robinson, is made of tougher stuff.) Jeremy Summerly's Oxford Camerata shine again (in various early English incarnations and Cristobal de Morales's beautiful *Magnificat octavi toni*) and the selection goes on to feature more than 60 composers, reaching right up to Walton, Finzi, Penderecki, Rautavaara and Rutter. As with the Michael Haydn set, pithy but useful annotations are of value and the sound quality maintains an all-round high standard.

A narrower but equally fascinating musical focus makes Bru Zane's beautifully produced set **The French Romantic Experience** well worth anyone's attention, especially those attracted to the less-familiar areas of 19th-century repertoire. In fact, I have rarely encountered a 'compilation' that has yielded so much listening pleasure. There are 10 discs in all,

two devoted to opera (including the 'other' *Flying Dutchman*, by Dietsch), one to operetta and café-concert, and then the cantata genre has a disc to itself, as does sacred music (a highlight there being Félicien David's quarter-hour *The Last Judgement*). There are also discs representing orchestral and concertante music (Hérold's Fourth Piano Concerto is a highlight), chamber and piano music, and mélodies. On the piano CD, try the sequence of Hérold, Dubois, Gounod and Gouvy (tracks 5-8) – it's pure delight.

The various recordings are drawn from an eclectic array of French labels (including Naïve, Glossa, Aparté, Alpha Classics and Bru Zane themselves) and the high-calibre artists include Véronique Gens, Hervé Niquet, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, François-René Duchâble and Bertrand Chamayou. The programmes, which have been extremely well chosen (each sequence rolls by like a dream), feature both concise single pieces (eg *Villanelle* for horn and orchestra by Dukas and the *Fantasia pastorale* for violin and orchestra by Gouvy) and, for the most part, individual movements. Under normal circumstances I would run a mile from this sort of piecemeal enterprise, attractive and well produced though it is, but in this case, given the skill of the planning, the appeal of listening even to separate movements and extracts by the likes of Godard, de La Tombelle, Jaëll, Toulmouche, Catel and many others whets the appetite for more – plus it helps that the standard of performance (and recording) is first-rate throughout. Treat it as an educational indulgence, I say. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Piano & Violin Concertos: Sir Neville Marriner
Moravec, Ohlsson *pfs* Sitkovetsky, Frank *vns*
Hännsler Classic © ⑥ HC19001

Vladimir Feltsman: The Complete Columbia Album Collection
Sony Classical © ⑧ 19075 91143-2

The British Line: A Celebration of British Music BBC Sym Chor & Orch / A Davis
Warner Classics © ⑩ 9029 54539-5

Nikolai Myaskovsky: Complete Symphonies
Svetlanov *cond* Alto © ⑭ ALC3141

Taneyev: Chamber Music Taneyev Qt et al
Northern Flowers © ⑩ NFPMA 98010

Michael Haydn Collection
Brilliant Classics © (28 discs) 95885

The Choral Collection
Naxos © (30 discs) 8 503298

Magnificat: The Song of Mary Through the Ages
Brilliant Classics © ⑭ 95928

The French Romantic Experience
Bru Zane © ⑩ BZ2001

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



Memories from Melo

The latest trawl of radio recordings from Melo Classic is typically eclectic and revelatory. Among the featured pianists is **Samson François** (MC1045), who never recorded Liszt's Sonata commercially, but whose highly flammable, grandly rhapsodising 1965 account recorded in recital as part of a mostly Liszt–Chopin programme will make you wonder again about the design of Romanticism's greatest piano work. One of Liszt's most dazzling 20th-century exponents was **György Cziffra** (MC1046), and though some Liszt is included in a 1961 Besançon recital, the highlights are by Schumann (Toccata; Sonata No 1) and Chopin (F minor Fantasy; A flat Polonaise). This is barnstorming pianism, often beefed up with augmented chords. It may potentially be subject to the law of diminishing returns, in terms of appreciation, but it has an undeniably high wow factor. **Edith Picht-Axenfeld** (2 CDs, MC1043), whom I always thought of as a rather sober exponent of harpsichord music, is boldly assertive on the piano in Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms's Op 76, Schumann's *Humoreske* and Chopin's Op 10 Études – though her Chopin Op 68 Mazurkas lie dead in the water. Cortot pupil **Reine Gianoli** (2 CDs, MC1044) offers a set of Chopin Op 28 Preludes which is every bit as involving as Cortot's own: like him, she swallows the cycle whole, treating it as an integrated sequence. Liszt's 11th *Hungarian Rhapsody* (not No 9, as stated) is again reminiscent of Cortot, and Beethoven's Sonata Op 31 No 3 approaches a benchmark, its progressive opening only just short of sounding 'cool', its galloping finale kicking up dust. **Wilhelm Kempff** (2 CDs, MC1042) defies expectations with a 1959 performance of the same work which is both urgent and restless, an assessment that can apply just as readily to his Brahms Op 118 and *Handel* Variations, and Schumann Fantasy. This is Kempff uncaged, keenly spontaneous and light years away from the chiselled perfectionist we know from so many of his commercial recordings.

A set dedicated to **Walter Gieseking** (2 CDs, MC1041) at the Hollywood Bowl 1955–56 has some unforgettable highlights.

Best of all is Mendelssohn's *Rondo capriccioso*, where Gieseking's lightness of touch spins a magic not present on any other version I've heard. Two Schubert impromptus (D935 No 3 and D899 No 4) are also memorably poetic (especially the warmly expressed B flat major from D935), as is Mendelssohn's *Lied ohne Worte*, Op 19 No 1. This is vintage Gieseking indeed. Other solo pieces include Scott's *Lotus Land* and Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *Cipressi* (both new to Gieseking's discography), Gieseking's own transcription of Strauss's *Lied Ständchen* and some rather careless Ravel (*Alborada del gracioso* – spoilt by premature applause – doesn't really pass muster). The concertos here are variable: Grieg under Izler Solomon features vibrant string playing from the Los Angeles PO and thrilling projection from Gieseking, whereas Schumann (Erich Leinsdorf) and Rachmaninov No 2 (Solomon again) find him playing to the gallery, often in a rather haphazard fashion. But the Schubert and Mendelssohn items are precious finds.

More consistent by far is a stunning set of performances (1965–68) by Jascha Heifetz's star pupil **Erick Friedman** (2 CDs, MC2034). The luminous, speaking tone is reminiscent of Heifetz's own, particularly in Debussy's Sonata (with Mischa Elman's accompanist Joseph Seiger), where the similarities are at their most striking. Other works of varying lengths again recall 'his master's voice', whether brilliant (Paganini *Moto perpetuo*) or passionate (Brahms Sonata No 3). Concertos by Beethoven (under Wolfgang Sawallisch, with an acrobatic first-movement cadenza and a ravishing slow movement) and Mendelssohn (Serge Baudo) – although generally less finely tooled than the works with piano – subscribe to a similar aesthetic of keen-edged attack and sweetened classicism.

An **Ossy Renardy** album (MC2037) includes the Brahms and Tchaikovsky violin concertos (the latter is cut) in poor sound, but Ernst's Concerto, a real wrist-breaker, is given the performance of a lifetime, and the sound isn't at all bad. Then there's **Tibor de Machula**'s distinctive cello playing (MC3014) – fast, tremulous vibrato, tonal warmth and a consistently musical approach

to phrasing. The CD opens with Boccherini's Concerto No 9, the central *Andantino grazioso* being a highlight. The Schumann Concerto with Karl Böhm and the Berlin Philharmonic was recorded in January 1945, and although frequently eloquent it lacks the depth of feeling that characterises his earlier wartime version under Furtwängler. Best is Saint-Saëns's First Concerto under Hans Rosbaud, the closing *Tempo primo* extraordinarily virtuosic. Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations (also from 1952) under Hans Müller-Kray takes a similar interpretative route that straddles the border between brilliance and introspection.

A 1960 recording of Beethoven's Violin Concerto by **Lola Bobesco** (MC2036) is also deeply affecting. In fact, it rather humbled me in light of recent comments I made when reviewing Christian Tetzlaff's latest recording – about slow and reverential accounts of the work that suggest a sort of Holy Grail. If Tetzlaff provides a strong case for the fast-lane prosecution, Bobesco's argument for the slow-coach defence could hardly be more powerful. The first movement is a broadly paced 25'34", with lovingly drawn phrasing and a triumphant account of Kreisler's ingenious cadenza. The *Larghetto*, though less intense than Friedman's, is hardly less beautiful, the finale appropriately rumbustious. Also included are Bach's A minor Concerto, whose eight-minute *Andante* harks back to the days when Bach slow movements were played *religioso*, and an orchestration of Vitali's Chaconne by Bobesco's friend and musical collaborator Jacques Genty. Müller-Kray and the Stuttgart RSO provide sober but effective accompaniments and the mono sound is generally excellent. As with all these Melo Classic releases, Michael Waiblinger's annotation is hugely informative. This is a fabulous bundle of discs.

RECORDING HIGHLIGHT



Beethoven, Bach etc

Lola Bobesco *vn*

Melo Classic © MC 2036

Just one of many revelations from Melo Classic this month



Gianoli's playing is reminiscent of her teacher Cortot's

Wilhelm Furtwängler's finest Brahms First

For those who are as yet unfamiliar with Wilhelm Furtwängler's 1951 Brahms First with the NWDR SO, a message from the gods is waiting in the wings. Of the various recordings of this work under Furtwängler, this is without question the most imposing, even though the orchestra lacks the sweetness and refinement of the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics in their Furtwängler-led versions. From the opening timpani strokes crossing a deep, trench-like bass line, the sheer size of the reading – its imposing breadth – hammers home; and Andrew Rose has done a sterling job of bolstering sound that was always good to start with. The reading is hugely flexible, shaped roughly along Schenkerian lines so that no gesture sounds out of place, no matter how extreme. Perhaps most impressive is the finale, where after a brooding *Adagio* the switch to *Allegro non troppo, ma con brio* witnesses increasing levels of intensity. Furtwängler makes you feel as if you've made an epic journey, the growling brass at 15'17" sounding an ominous note before the whole orchestra erupts in an unstoppable rush of excitement. The effect is overwhelming. The coupling, Brahms's *Haydn* Variations, is as impressive, Variation 7 like a graceful lullaby, Furtwängler cueing a traceable sense of line and the *Andante* finale

majestic in the extreme. This CD is like a 'Furtwängler calling card': it tells you all you need to know about a genuine rostrum giant. If you happen to own a copy, this transfer will be an improvement on what you already have. But if you don't have it in your collection, you stand to learn an immense amount about one of Romanticism's greatest musical masterpieces simply by sitting back and listening to it.

THE RECORDING



Furtwängler

Conducts Brahms

Pristine Audio © PASC563

Stokowski's Brahms: a case of sobriety and fire

If Furtwängler draws Brahms from the depths of his inner self, Leopold Stokowski takes him to a quality outfitter for a snazzy makeover. A coupling of the Second and Fourth Symphonies, set down in 1929 and 1933 respectively, is revealing and not in the least what you'd expect. Symphony No 2 is extremely broad, the first movement rich in texture and very well built, the second positively voluptuous – such fabulous string playing from the Philadelphians. But for all that, Stokowski knows precisely where to turn on the heat. Probably the most controversial aspect of the performance is the finale, which flatly refuses to fly – not a hint of *con spirito* anywhere. Yet (again) there's something oddly reassuring about hearing a viewpoint that maintains a steady pulse, refuses to rush, keeps the score grounded. Symphony No 4 is entirely different. It's lighter in texture, the *Andante moderato* featuring gently blended strings, the feisty scherzo truly a bundle of fun – fast and furious, with well-buoyed rhythms. The horns near the close are magnificent and the basses keep up the rhythmic momentum. As to the finale, Stokowski eschews expected tempo fluctuations and in general holds fast to an urgent pulse, sticking to it until the blazing coda.

Rarely has Stokowski sounded more like Toscanini, appealing more to the intellect than to the senses. Transfer engineer Mark Obert-Thorn offers chapter and verse on the actual recordings, citing recording venues and, in the case of the Second Symphony, an especially odd case of alternative takes. Mark's transfers are, as usual, first-rate.

THE RECORDING



Brahms Symphonies Nos 2 & 4
Philadelphia Orchestra /
Stokowski
Pristine Audio © PASC562

Bach to the '50s – in stereo

George Malcolm's ornate way with Bach has made a generous showing on CD of late, what with Decca Eloquence treating us to various concertos, *The Art of Fugue* and more recently the *Goldberg Variations*. Now First Hand Records has turned up with yet more as part of the third volume of their Early Stereo Recordings series, namely the Concerto for four harpsichords and strings, after Vivaldi (BWV1065), and the Concerto in C for three harpsichords and strings (BWV1064). The players involved are Thurston Dart, Eileen Joyce, Malcolm and the conductor and multi-instrumentalist Denis Vaughan (lost to us in 2017). Both are given in stereo – very good stereo I might add – for the first time on CD, whereas Vivaldi's Concerto in D minor for four harpsichords and strings (arranged by Dart), Malcolm's inventive and amusing *Variations on a Theme of Mozart* for four harpsichords and a programme of Sweelinck, Byrd, Froberger and Pachelbel skilfully played by Ralph Kirkpatrick are receiving their first stereo releases.

Another Bach masterpiece, the Cantata BWV6 (stereo again, and this time a first-ever release), sung in English as *Bide with us*, involves contralto Marjorie Thomas – a Proms regular and one of the best-known singers in oratorio after the Second World War – and David Galliver, who in his day was a favourite tenor both here in England and in Australia. On this showing, Galliver, who has a Heddle Nash-like timbre, comes off best whereas Thomas sounds far from comfortable in 'Thou, whose praises never end'. Reginald Jacques conducts the Jacques Orchestra and the Bach Choir, their manner of performance beefy in the way that many Bach choral performances of the period were; but the purely instrumental works (with the Pro Arte Orchestra under Boris Ord) are for the most part refreshingly buoyant. This is a most enjoyable programme, with excellent notes by Mahan Esfahani and Peter Bromley.

THE RECORDING



Bach, Vivaldi, etc
Dart, Joyce, Malcolm, Vaughan,
Kirkpatrick *hpd*s et al
First Hand Records © FHR60

Classics RECONSIDERED



Harriet Smith and
Tim Parry reappraise
Pollini's classic 1972
recording of the complete
Chopin Études on DG



Chopin

Études

Maurizio Pollini *pf*

DG

As Cortot wisely observed, Chopin's Études are as inaccessible to the musician without virtuosity as they are to the virtuoso without musicianship. There is no key to precisely how each study transmutes a technical keyboard problem into pure music; it is in the balance of delight in the keyboard and in the expressive nature of the music which each study embodies that true artistry is found. Pollini is primarily a technician, interested in the virtuosity of the music and the thrill which a brilliant performance of it engenders. At his best, he is very exciting; and he is capable of producing beautiful, warm tone for the reflective E major Study of Op 10, a performance that is more direct than

Tamás Vásáry's though not so simple and tender as John Browning's. He can also respond to the lightness and delicacy of fingerwork required for the first study of Op 25; Vásáry is more reflective here, but not so appreciative of the filigree. But Pollini seems really most enthusiastic with the more dramatic, demanding studies. He sets off in Op 10 with a terrific attack, and for all the superb presence of the recording his tone cannot help becoming hard and very brittle, with a cannonading bass; Vásáry is steadier here, while Browning is more vehement but also, with less expense of energy, grander. In the *Revolutionary* Study, Pollini seems to glory in the music's violence where Vásáry is more sensitive to its drama and Browning, less spectacular, suggests greater depths of tension.

The new recording is technically outstanding; but unless this is the aspect

of the Études which is counted the most important – and with this music, there is an obvious point in having a recording that really does do full justice to the range and subtlety of piano tone – then I would not commend Pollini above the two earlier issues. JOC gave a judicious comparison of the two in her July 1970 review of Browning's record, and her perceptive comments should be referred to by prospective buyers of either record. Perhaps it is fair to say that for those whose interest in the music leans towards its subtle virtuosity, it is Vásáry who responds more sensitively and with the more acute ear for detail; while those who approach the Études more as mood pictures, as Romantic fragments, will find their colour and diversity more richly expounded by Browning.

John Warrack 11/72

Harriet Smith Context is all, isn't it? The Alfred Cortot quote that John Warrack cited in his original review – 'Chopin's Études are as inaccessible to the musician without virtuosity as they are to the virtuoso without musicianship' – still holds absolutely true, I think, even today when there are myriad versions available to us. JW clearly felt that Pollini triumphed technically but found him more questionable musically speaking, though other *Gramophone* reviewers were subsequently more enthusiastic – not least Joan Chissell and Robert Layton. Of course JW didn't have the luxury that we have today of knowing the Testament set of Pollini's unissued 1960 EMI recording, which seems to me to have more humanity about it than the DG set.

Tim Parry Pollini's technique, especially in his younger days, has never been in

question. The DG Chopin Études were recorded in early 1972, around the same time as the outstanding LP of Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petrushka* and Prokofiev's Piano Sonata No 7. When I first got to know the disc as a teenager, it was only my second recording of Chopin's Études, and it so comprehensively outclassed the first (Ian Hobson's dutiful account on Classics for Pleasure) that for a while I was simply amazed by the sheer technical finish. But I'm no longer seduced by Pollini's steely virtuosity, as impressive as it is. There is, I agree, a greater warmth to much of Pollini's 1960 recording, which was made in the aftermath of his success at the Chopin Competition at the age of 18; Pollini refused to allow its release (which ended his fledgling relationship with EMI), and the disc was finally issued by Testament in 2011.

HS From Hobson's Choice to Pollini – that's quite a leap! I wonder if the reluctance to allow the EMI release was down to his time studying with Michelangeli, who was of course famed for his cool brilliance. But just take the first of Op 10 in the DG account – there's an almost mechanistic quality to it that renders it terrifyingly powerful, brilliant though it unquestionably is. Or No 7 from the same set which in the DG account sounds almost prosaic compared to the probing humanity of the 1960 reading where, for instance, the way he brings out the left hand (from bar 29) is very tenderly done. And while the opening of the mellifluous E major (Op 10 No 3), works well enough, I find the inner section gains a hardness as the dynamic increases.

TP I'm sure you're right about Pollini's studies with Michelangeli. Having won the



'Cool Pollini': his 1972 account is technically imperious, but has always divided opinion

Chopin Competition, he disappeared from the public eye, and the time he spent with the notoriously fastidious perfectionist Michelangeli seems to have given rise to a sense of austere detachment in his playing. There is a live account of the Op 10 Études from Milan, privately recorded in 1956 when Pollini was 14 and now available on YouTube, and apart from the phenomenal technical élan (including some very fast tempos), what stands out is the highly personalised imagination. Once again, Pollini refused to sanction its wider circulation; he seems to have disowned what he probably considers to be the misdirected follies of his youth. But while it certainly lacks the polish of his later playing, it reveals a raw Romantic spirit that was largely eradicated when Pollini re-emerged after his studies with Michelangeli.

HS I must admit I hadn't discovered this super-youthful Pollini previously. It's completely bonkers isn't it, but in an interesting way – his technique is such that the fast Études, such as Nos 4 and 5, almost sound insolently easy (as compared to the DG versions, where sometimes I think he's almost Beethovenian in his strength and energy), but what is also fascinating are the slower Études, where he simply doesn't seem to know what tempo to pick, particularly in No 3 but also in No 6; it's almost as if he seems slightly embarrassed by the sheer emotion of Chopin's melodic lines.

TP Yes, indeed – it's possible to chart the progress from the rather wild, youthful impetuosity of the 1956 Op 10s, through the more measured 1960 account on Testament, to the sheer brilliance and weight of the DG recording. In the slower Études, especially Op 10 No 3, the young Pollini doesn't yet know how to shape the line convincingly and the rubato is rather wayward. In 1960 he brings far greater poise, but in 1972, as you say, the middle section becomes brittle and over-driven. In the faster Études, the changes are more to do with sonority, warmth and colour, and the various personal touches and kind of interior interest that the young Pollini injected into many of these pieces have not so much matured as been replaced with a strait-laced literalism. Op 10 Nos 1 and 4 are both good examples: the playing is obviously on an extremely high level, but to me it sounds monochromatic and somewhat overbearing.

HS I tend to agree, particularly with the 'monochromatic' observation. But what you hear as 'literalism' Pollini would probably assert to be a kind of classicism, of putting the music first. Turning to the Op 25 set, on the whole, I have similar doubts – that any earlier spontaneity found in the Testament set has been firmly rejected. Yet there are things that I think *do* work – the first of the set, for instance, which comes off very compellingly. So does the second, for that matter – there's

a wonderful moment where he just eases the tempo for a moment at 0'59" (track 14), which is very telling. But something like the introduction to No 7 seems somewhat ponderous. There's a degree more fluidity in the Testament version at this point, which I prefer, though it's still not exactly free-flowing. But it still sounds lacking in warmth compared to, say, Perahia.

TP Those first two of the Op 25 set are rather lovely. Pollini brings more flexibility to his phrasing, and at 1'05" in the F minor (track 14 again) he even hints at an inner melodic line, albeit fleetingly. But then we get to the middle section of No 5, and the stiffness of phrase and tone returns. You mention Perahia: compare his recording here, where the left-hand melody has a voluptuous shapeliness and tonal richness, and a real separation from the *leggiere* right-hand passagework that Pollini misses. Pollini's clinical efficiency in the final two Études, too, falls into the easy trap of relentlessness that both Perahia and the young Ashkenazy manage to avoid. Listen to either of those, and although they are obviously playing the same number of notes, it doesn't feel like it.

HS Ah yes, the young Ashkenazy – another wonderful account. And perhaps that's the issue here. While Pollini can be coolly impressive in the DG set, these days there are so many different interpretations available out there that to me it ultimately feels disappointingly one-dimensional. Personally I prefer the Testament ones, as you may have worked out by now! I happen to think that JW was spot on in his initial review back in 1972, and it's later-comers with whom I have something of an issue. But of course the Pollini-ites among us will probably have my guts for garters for such an assertion, as the late, great and much-missed Quita Chavez used to say. What do you think?

TP I agree that JW's review pretty much nails it. You're right that this recording was held in higher regard by others, and it was frequently lauded as a benchmark for subsequent recordings. Despite my teenage enthusiasm for its impeccable technical poise, I ultimately think Pollini's engagement with the music is limited, and other recordings, from the early Ashkenazy and more recent Perahia to countless others we haven't had space to mention here, only serve to highlight this. Maybe Pollini's coolly objective style was fashionable for a while, but in the end I think we both feel that cool objectivity just isn't enough in this music. **G**

Books



Tim Ashley welcomes an English translation of a classic biography:

'Debussy's infidelities – "these insignificant little stories", as he once described them – must have made him a well-nigh impossible partner'



Andrew Mellor reads an engaging book of choral conversations:

'The thousands who attend The Sixteen's Choral Pilgrimage concerts are often coming to it fresh and secular – that is its triumph'

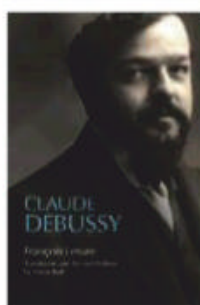
Claude Debussy

By François Lesure

Translated and revised by Marie Rolf

University of Rochester Press, HB, 544pp, £40

ISBN 978-1-580-46903-6



An English edition of François Lesure's biography of Debussy has long been overdue. Published by

Fayard in 2003, some two years after its author's death, it is widely regarded as a milestone in Debussy scholarship, forming a point of departure for much of the literature about the composer that has appeared in its wake. Director of the music department at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Lesure, a prominent musicologist in academic circles, had access to Debussy's correspondence, most of it unpublished at the time, though a collected edition of his letters, on which Lesure also worked, was issued by Gallimard in 2005. The text has been expanded, albeit not extensively, in the light of more recent scholarship by its translator, Marie Rolf, who has also added substantial additional notes and realigned Lesure's references to the original letters to those in the Gallimard edition.

Writing with exemplary conciseness and cool detachment, Lesure gives us a complex portrait of 'an artist who sacrificed nearly everything for his work', and, while presenting us with a marvellously detailed depiction of the artistic and social milieu in which he moved, he places his primary emphasis on the contradictions within the man, which in turn fuelled his creativity. The portrait is at times unsparing, for Debussy could be tetchy, difficult and on occasion extremely unpleasant.

His aloofness was apparent from the outset. Raymond Bonheur, a fellow pupil at the Conservatoire, described him as entering 'into life with the tastes, needs and nonchalance of a great lord', an attitude which, under the influence of

the Symbolists that formed his circle in the 1890s, eventually crystallised into a preference for 'an art that was elitist and disdainful of the public', as Lesure puts it with remarkable bluntness. Debussy's relationships with his professors at the Conservatoire, meanwhile, were by no means as clear-cut as some have thought. Many expressed a guarded admiration for his talents, and his rebellion against the Conservatoire's values largely focused on his intense dislike of his harmony teacher Émile Durand. Even he, however, was by no means negative, describing Debussy's work, almost prophetically, as 'hardly orthodox, but ... truly ingenious'.

He could be opportunistic. Though drawn to a Bohemian lifestyle, he made sure he got himself noticed by Paris's *grande bourgeoisie*: in 1894, while working on *Faune*, he could be found in fashionable salons playing and singing extracts from Wagner 'with a bad voice, to which we are all becoming accustomed, since its expression is so convincing', as one listener put it. Given the revolutionary nature of his music, it comes as something of a surprise to discover that in later life some deemed him to have become conservative. After the success of *Pelléas*, Lesure comments, 'most of his contemporaries thought he was becoming gentrified and that he had opted for material ease and conjugal bliss'.

Lesure's examination of his private life is nothing if not exacting. Debussy frequently questioned whether he was suited to domesticity, and his many infidelities – 'these insignificant little stories', as he once described them – must have made him a well-nigh impossible partner. His decision to leave his first wife Lilly Texier (whose 'daily tyranny', he claimed, prevented him from composing) for Emma Bardac resulted in a public scandal that alienated many of his friends. Lesure dismisses as 'the product of conjecture' the idea, taken at face value by some, that in 1891 Debussy had an affair with the sculptress Camille Claudel. Rolf's additions, however, supply us with fresh details of his liaisons

elsewhere: Henri Vasnier, we discover, was indeed aware of Debussy's relationship with his wife; and it was an affair with Alice Peter, sister-in-law of Debussy's friend René Peter and dedicatee of 'La chevelure' from the *Chansons de Bilitis*, that provoked the major crisis in his relationship with Gaby Dupont in 1897.

Lesure is equally incisive in his depiction of Debussy's relationships with an often hostile press ('decadent', one notices, was a word regularly flung at him in his lifetime) and a public that swung between indifference and adoring cults of 'Debussyism'. Paradoxically, though, for a book in which detail is paramount, you occasionally want more, particularly in regard to Debussy's work as a music critic and his deeply ambivalent attitude towards it. Lesure, one notices, is also comparatively reticent in his discussion of the long progress of the cancer that eventually claimed Debussy's life.

It is, however, a most magnificent achievement and its appearance in English allows us to fully understand its seminal influence and the groundbreaking nature of Lesure's scholarship. It should perhaps be pointed out that it is very much a biography, rather than a life-and-works, and for discussion of the music itself you need to look elsewhere. But as a depiction of the man and his world, it is exceptional, and no one who cares for Debussy can afford to be without it. **Tim Ashley**

A New Heaven

Harry Christophers and The Sixteen

By Sara Mohr-Pietsch

Faber & Faber, HB, 307pp, £16.99

ISBN 978-0-571-34852-7



It doesn't look like The Sixteen coughed up any cash to fund the publication of this book, even if first impressions appear otherwise. It reads like a giant testimonial to the group – its sound, make-



A milestone in Debussy scholarship: François Lesure's magnificent biography has been translated into English

up, repertoire, *modus operandi* and, of course, likeable founder Harry Christophers.

Fair enough, to a point. One of the most engaging features of Sara Mohr-Pietsch's conversations with Christophers is the charting of the conductor's creation, in *The Sixteen*, of a choral sound in his own image. *A New Heaven* is a light read but probably has to be: Christophers's non-academic philosophy is as straightforward as his explanation of it. He wants a blended and disciplined choir but one built on expression, character, direction of phrase/line, centrality of text and a certain vibrancy of tone (a 'spin' on the note).

It gets most meaningful when discussion turns to Genesis Sixteen, the exclusively non-Oxbridge training choir Christophers has established as a reaction against poor music provision in state schools (Christophers, the son of publicans, who went through the choir school and system on a scholarships, is coolly classless). In Genesis, we learn, he almost invariably receives a cohort of singers with bad habits. They are forced to sing lying on their backs, into mirrors, in circles facing outwards. 'I want to hear your voice, not you singing in a way you think you ought to,' Christophers tells them. It's just the way *The Sixteen* sound: clipped in their freedom, disciplined in their wildness.

I enjoyed Mohr-Pietsch's introducing of the set works Christophers has her listen to. She describes them deftly and evocatively as she repeatedly emerges from London into the countryside by train to visit her interviewee in Kent (I was hungry for more – nothing complements a train journey like polyphony). She knows more about these pieces than she lets on, which is endearing and helpful. But if the book is to encourage those without specialist knowledge, there's potential for confusion as terms such as 'underlay', 'polyphony', 'false relation' and 'cadence' are tossed around without pause for explanation. Yes, they could be Googled. But taking it back a step, some readers would have benefited from some explanation of basic choral anatomy and a precis of what Choral Evensong is. After all, those many thousands who attend Choral Pilgrimage concerts (and who will surely buy this book at the back afterwards, just as they do Coro CDs) are often coming to it fresh and secular. That is its triumph.

For the rest of us, I willed Mohr-Pietsch to introduce more critical ideas for Christophers to defend, to deal with what *The Sixteen* isn't as well as what it is (though the Chapter on the Handel & Haydn Society provides a good laboratory control here) and be more journalistic with

her follow-up questions: if the MacMillan works are so tailored to the human and stylistic DNA of *The Sixteen*, can they work for other choirs? If Christophers says 'I think about life, about the future, and I start to worry', follow through.

Occasional knotty issues will certainly interest hardcore readers. Christophers notices a soulless sound in some new choral groups and observes 'how small the pool of good young choral composers is'. But the latter is problematic considering his belief that the Renaissance composers he performs 'would be writing operas now'; the ruinous mistake of the English choral scene has been to look within itself for new voices

rather than to the wider composing community – as in the rest of Europe – and the focus on James MacMillan, an exception, reinforces the fact. There is a risk that his music is fetishised here, but as soon as you listen to *The Sixteen* performing it you're nodding in agreement (I still wonder why, when Christophers believes foremost in text and communication, so much of the music he commissions is sung in Latin).

The conductor's account of his upbringing, education and early career are highly engaging. He is well aware of the parallel universe that is Oxbridge. The fact he understands real, normal people comes across vividly. Claims for his humility are laid on with a trowel, but anyone who has met him knows it's true. His account of *The Sixteen*'s problems and pragmatism (particularly its adopting of the Rolling Stones recording-touring model) and his admission of inexperience when arriving in Boston are frank and inspiring. The book's ending is rushed (it's reasoned for, but still seems unnecessary) and the sense that many questions are lined up for the conductor to boot in is hard to avoid. But if *A New Heaven* is a warm bath, it's also a good read, occasionally a deeply revealing one, and is piloted with skill.

Andrew Mellor

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Richard Strauss's *Symphonia domestica*

A cross between tone poem and symphony, this very personal work of Strauss's has been subject to much derision. **Hugo Shirley** is its champion, hoping to bring round remaining doubters with the best recordings

Richard Strauss's first major orchestral work of the 20th century has long been one of his most contentious. A direct precursor of *Salome*, *Symphonia domestica* (1902-03) brought the composer's home life into the concert hall – a place traditionally reserved for loftier ideas. But for Strauss, domesticity and married life were an essential part of his creative existence: he and his famously sharp-tongued and short-tempered wife, Pauline, are represented in several autobiographical scores, from *Heldenleben* to *Intermezzo*. In these and other works, marriage was elevated to a cause for celebration, a state through which a special sort of sublimity could be achieved.

Symphonia domestica nonetheless precipitated debates as to exactly what the suitable subjects for music were, what constitutes bad taste or kitsch, and where, in the ever-shifting sands of the early 20th century, various aesthetic lines could and should be drawn. It contributed to standard criticisms of Strauss, too, employing as it did the grandest of orchestral apparatuses for what was (for many) the most meagre of subjects. To top it off, the composer showed an apparently indecent interest in earning money from the work when after conducting the less-than-satisfactory premiere at Carnegie Hall, New York, on March 21, 1904, he received \$1000 to conduct two further performances in the city's Wanamaker's department store, where a whole floor was converted into a makeshift concert hall.

Strauss's friend Romain Rolland, on hearing *Symphonia domestica* in 1904, praised its musical content but berated its programme. And since then, many critics have found the programme so tasteless that,

it seems, they've barely got as far as the music itself. In the early 1950s, Lionel Salter began a review in these pages by describing the work as an 'overblown piece of orchestral pretentiousness ... mark[ing] an extreme point in Strauss's curious tendency to exhibitionism' (3/52). A few years later, he was calling it 'an embarrassing work ... in monstrously poor taste', adding that 'the night scene between the two parents is the nearest thing I know to pornography in music' (1/57). (Had he not heard *Der Rosenkavalier*, one wonders, let alone *Tristan und Isolde*?) Fast forward a couple of decades, though, and it had become, in Richard Osborne's words, 'a superb piece of Strauss ... too much neglected' (3/75).

PROBLEM CHILD

It still, however, remains one of the most problematic of Strauss's major scores, not least in terms of genre. Unlike with any others of his tone poems, Strauss – while composing it – called it exactly that in his designation 'sinfonische Dichtung'; but one should not ignore its final title, either: as with *Eine Alpensinfonie*, completed a dozen years later, it is probably best understood as both symphony *and* tone poem. Strauss's programme – much of it made public, a great deal more hidden away in his sketches – is indeed graphic: there's the playing, bawling and bathing child (Hans Richter famously joked that this baby bathing made more of a din than the whole destruction of Valhalla); and the parents bickering, reconciling and, in the second section of the *Adagio*, making love.

The score's treatment of its many leitmotifs can on occasion seem intractable, but Strauss is also masterful in bringing them together to take flight. He transcends

his subject matter early in the *Adagio* when the soaring melody depicts his own creative activity; in the finale's double fugue and ultimate apotheosis, meanwhile, the themes increasingly shed their specific connotations as musical imperatives take over. There are also hints of masterpieces to come: of *Salome* in the winding motivic development and the potent erotic charge; of the Marschallin's Act 1 scene (*Der Rosenkavalier*) in the melancholy lullaby and chiming clock; even of the Empress's bedroom scene (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) in the remarkable dream sequence that concludes the *Adagio*. In choosing the subject that he did, moreover, Strauss also struck a significant blow for modernism, relieving concert music of its 19th-century pretensions in much the same way that *Salome* relieved opera from its need to stage Wagnerian sacrifice and redemption.

Such arguments alone, though, cannot entirely protect the work from charges of excess and poor taste, charges that have often been given extra weight by bad or insensitive performances. Bombastic execution does *Symphonia domestica* no favours; accounts that reveal the warmth, humour and sense of bustling, unregulated activity at its heart go a long way to disarming criticism. Performances that career headlong through the score's final minutes (as the composer requests, and himself does) help mitigate charges that he let the final movement go on longer than necessary – though even in the finest performances such thoughts inevitably remain. But ultimately, if a performance is enjoyable, joyous and brings a smile to the face, then it can hardly overstay its welcome.

Symphonia domestica's reputation no doubt accounts for the fact that the discography,



Richard Strauss with his wife Pauline and their son Franz in 1910: their home life was vividly portrayed in *Symphonia domestica*, completed in 1903

when compared with that of Strauss's other mature orchestral works, is relatively modest. Recordings are weighted towards the earlier years and come disproportionately from the US (the work's American premiere perhaps played a decisive role in its reception stateside) and Austria and Germany (notably the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonics). Only two UK orchestras have taken the piece into the studio, one of them being the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, in an impressive account under Christopher Seaman (IMP Classics, 8/94). There are no studio recordings by French or Dutch orchestras – the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra is one top-class Strauss band that's conspicuously absent. Several prominent Strauss conductors – Böhm, Solti and Bernard Haitink, for example – didn't record the work; but others, including Zubin Mehta and Lorin Maazel, have made a speciality of it.

BEGINNINGS AT HOME

Another conductor to make a speciality of it – or, at least, to champion it in the face of criticism – was **Richard Strauss** himself, and we're lucky to have two recordings by him: one made with the Vienna Philharmonic in February 1944, and an off-air recording of a concert with the Philharmonia that he conducted in London to a packed Royal Albert Hall in October 1947. The first is in impressive sound; the second is inevitably sketchier, with regular 10-second gaps whenever the disc had to be changed. Both show the composer keeping the work light on its feet, revelling in its humour, but never at the expense of fire and passion.

Most importantly, Strauss himself is a master at preventing the score from sounding overblown: *Symphonia domestica*'s counterpoint is taut but never tortuous in his hands, lithe rather than laboured. Charges against the work's final minutes being overblown and bombastic are diffused by the sheer boisterousness he achieves. One should never assume a composer's performance to be definitive, but in the case of Strauss – alongside Mahler one of the greatest conductors



Strauss in 1947 – the year of his second self-conducted recording of *Symphonia domestica*

of his generation – matters are different. He sets a blueprint for how to convey affection and conviction in this score, how to marry grandeur and élan, and how, above all, to communicate that it's a work that one fully believes in. Similar things might be said of **Wilhelm Furtwängler**'s radio broadcast account, recorded with the Berlin Philharmonic a month before Strauss went into the studio in Vienna (one can only wonder about the effect this apparently frivolous score had on listeners in this darkest of times). The performance is a joy – affectionate, warm and impulsive, it pushes more to the extremes without ever toppling over into excess.

Two further recordings from the 1950s keep us firmly in the Straussian heartlands. The composer's great friend and collaborator **Clemens Krauss** recorded the work with the Vienna Philharmonic in May 1951 in an account that has long been a benchmark. It still stands up superbly, despite the occasionally thin sound of Decca's early LP engineering, with the first violins – admittedly superb, and always playing with a sense of bounce – prominent in a narrow sound picture. Similar to

Strauss's own recordings in terms of pacing, Krauss's trips along with a lovely *joie de vivre*, the opening minutes as playful as the last minutes are irresistible. Above all, though, it's a performance that glows from inside with an unmistakable affection – for the work, and for the man whom Krauss knew so well. From 1956 we have **Franz Konwitschny**'s account with another Straussian orchestra par excellence, the Dresden Staatskapelle. It's a recording especially notable for a superb account of the finale, but marred by over-reverberant sound. Konwitschny's rip-roaring performance with the same orchestra, live in Salzburg in 1961, is also very much worth hearing.

We can't go without mentioning another early European recording from what's perhaps an unexpected source: **Carl Schuricht**'s performance with the orchestra of La Scala, Milan, dating from 1941. As he also would two decades later when he recorded the work with the SWR RSO, Schuricht shows himself to be a fluent and rewarding 'domestician', with pacing that reflects the Straussian norm in performances that are both effective

HISTORIC CHOICE

Vienna Philharmonic / Richard Strauss

Beulah ⑤ ➔ 1PDR40

One should never get hung up on composer-conducted recordings, but Strauss here



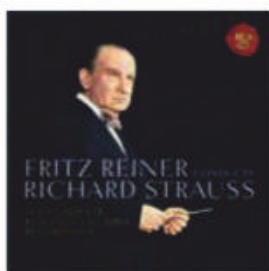
achieves a near miraculous blend of grandeur, lightness, affection and musical sense. It sounds excellent for its age, and speaks with striking directness.

THE AMERICAN CLASSIC

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Fritz Reiner

RCA ⑤ ⑪ ➔ 88883 79055-2

The finest of all the accounts hailing from the US, Reiner's recording with the Chicago SO has



an irresistible conviction and sense of purpose, with vibrant, characterful orchestral playing matched by engineering that still sounds fresh more than 60 years on.

MODERNIST CHOICE

SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg / François-Xavier Roth

SWR Music ⑤ SWR19021CD

This version is the perfect choice for



Domestica sceptics and, as I wrote in my review, 'confidently repositions [it] very much as a work of the nascent 20th century, not as a dubious hangover of the 19th'.

and enjoyable. But be warned: the sound on the Italian recording is not good.

STATESIDE STARTS

The same qualities are there in a swift, enjoyable – if occasionally rather brusque – account by Eugene Ormandy with the Philadelphia Orchestra, which, dating from 1938 (Victor, 3/00 – nla), is the earliest of all – and although it’s currently unavailable, it can be sampled on YouTube. The New York Philharmonic has also recently made available via digital release Bruno Walter’s version of the work, in concert in 1945: a lively, enjoyable account in slightly boxy, boomy sound.

Happily, **Fritz Reiner** included *Symphonia domestica* (but not *Eine Alpensinfonie*) in his influential Strauss cycle, and his 1956 recording stands up superbly more than 60 years later. It’s the earliest recording in this survey for which one needn’t make any concessions for sound: Living Stereo’s engineers realistically capture a Chicago Symphony Orchestra on vivid form in a performance that mixes old-school affection and warmth with a new sort of orchestral brilliance and brassy exuberance. The interpretation is spritely from the start, skittish and playful where it needs to be (just sample the first two minutes), warm in a superb account of the *Adagio*, and brilliantly alive in the finale.

George Szell’s 1964 Cleveland account, produced for the Strauss centenary, is hardly less fine, cleanly recorded and sharply etched, and with no shortage of affection. He can push a little hard, though, and, after one of the most furiously passionate love scenes on record, he offers a dreamscape that is just a little too neurotic. It’s another performance that clearly believes in the work, but Szell’s live Salzburg account with the Berlin Philharmonic from later the same year is perhaps even finer, marrying the same single-mindedness of purpose with a touch more fire and impetuosity – the finale will leave you breathless. **Dimitri Mitropoulos**’s 1957 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic, likewise made live in Salzburg, could hardly be a greater contrast, with the *Adagio* a particular victim to an approach that can be stolid and laboured. But it’s an interesting document, and the first recording to capture what would become an increasingly widespread tendency to broaden tempos in the work.

Two more live recordings from this period also reflect that expansionist tendency. In 1959 **Charles Munch** conducted the work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which Strauss, in a letter to his father, praised as ‘one of the greatest



Fritz Reiner: his 1956 recording still sounds fresh

orchestras in the world’ after conducting them on his 1904 US tour. On this occasion, however, there are a couple of minor mishaps (the brass have a bit of a tough time), and the opening of the finale is perhaps a tad too frantic. But Munch

conducts a big, open-hearted, tender and generous account, in sound – as remastered by Pristine Classical – that is pleasingly open and airy. The other performance, from **Jascha Horenstein** and the BBC SO in 1961, is fine too (also on Pristine, though from an inferior source). It’s a bit on the leisurely side, except in the fiery, impassioned account of the *Adagio*.

DOMESTIC LUXURY

Throughout the height of the LP era there are slim pickings, with only three studio recordings of the work in the 15 years that followed Szell’s 1964 Cleveland account. On the first of his two recordings, **Zubin Mehta** conducts a handsome-sounding but strangely uninvolved Los Angeles Philharmonic in a performance that one starts to feel is conceived more out of love for sonority and orchestral polish than for the work itself. **Herbert von Karajan** declared *Symphonia domestica* one of Strauss’s greatest works, and his famous account with the Berlin Philharmonic (now available only as part of a huge Warner Classics set) was recorded at Paris’s Salle Wagram in 1973. It captures the Berliners on supremely burnished form, and the conductor’s strong Straussian instincts serve him well: the orchestral

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1941	Orch of La Scala, Milan / Schuricht	Urania (M) ➔ RM11 905
1944	BPO / Furtwängler	DG (S) (35 discs) 483 7288; (F) ➔ 483 7628
1944	VPO / Strauss	Beulah (F) ➔ 1PDR40
1947	Philh Orch / Strauss	Testament (B) (2) SBT2 1441 (4/09)
1951	VPO / Krauss	Testament (F) SBT1184; Decca (S) (5) ➔ 478 6493DC5 (3/52 ^R , 9/14)
1956	Staatskapelle Dresden / Konwitschny	DG (B) ➔ 477 5483 (1/57 ^R)
1956	Chicago SO / Reiner	RCA (S) (11) ➔ 88883 79055-2 (3/58 ^R)
1957	VPO / Mitropoulos	Orfeo (F) C565 011B
1959	Boston SO / Munch	Pristine Classical (F) PASC568
1960	SWR RSO, Stuttgart / Schuricht	Hänssler Classic (M) (10) ➔ CD93 292 (3/13)
1961	BBC SO / Horenstein	Pristine Classical (F) PASC428
1961	Staatskapelle Dresden / Konwitschny	Orfeo (S) (2) C839 112B
1964	Cleveland Orch / Szell	Sony Classical (S) (106 discs) 88895 47185-2 (10/64 ^R , 11/18)
1964	BPO / Szell	Orfeo (M) (7) ➔ C704 077L
1968	Los Angeles PO / Mehta	Decca (S) (23 discs) 482 1836 (9/70 ^R)
1972	Staatskapelle Dresden / Kempe	Warner Classics (S) (9) 9029 55425-1 (3/75 ^R , 12/92 ^R)
1973	BPO / Karajan	Warner Classics (S) (101 discs) 9029 59551-9 (4/74 ^R)
1983	VPO / Maazel	DG (M) ➔ 479 3773GOR (11/84 ^R)
1985	BPO / Mehta	Sony Classical (S) (8) 88985 32899-2 (7/87 ^R)
1987	Scottish Nat Orch / N Järvi	Chandos (B) (2) CHAN10206 (3/88 ^R)
1988	Seattle SO / Schwarz	Naxos (S) ➔ 8 571216 (4/90 ^R)
1990	Minnesota Orch / de Waart	Virgin/Erato (F) ➔ 561460-2
1995	Bavarian RSO / Maazel	Sony Classical (S) (30 discs) 88697 93238-2 (11/96 ^R)
1995	VPO / Previn	DG (F) 449 188-2GH; Decca (S) (13) 478 6480DC13 (11/96 ^R , 4/14)
2002	Zurich Tonhalle Orch / Zinman	Arte Nova (M) ➔ 74321 98335-2 (11/03)
2007	Staatskapelle Weimar / Wit	Naxos (B) 8 570895 (1/10)
2012	Frankfurt Op & Museum Orch / Weigle	Oehms (F) OC889
2012-14	Berlin RSO / Janowski	Pentatone (F) (S) PTC5186 507 (8/15)
2014	SWR SO, Baden-Baden & Freiburg / Roth	SWR Music (F) SWR19021CD (4/17)

PHOTOGRAPHY: TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

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David Zinman conducting the Tonhalle Orchestra in 2002, a few months after their excellent recording of the Strauss

sound is magnificent (although a couple of slips make it through) and the climaxes have rarely sounded grander. But the richness of it all means that levity and wit are all but precluded; the approach feels somewhat broad-brush, with Karajan apparently little interested, for example, in the dream sequence at the end of the *Adagio*. Although it's less luxurious, I find **Rudolf Kempe's** 1972 recording with the Dresden Staatskapelle more satisfactory. As with his other Strauss recordings with the orchestra, Kempe always finds a musically convincing path through the notes, and the playing is consistently characterful and distinctive. Like Karajan and Mehta, though, Kempe favours a cautious tempo in the final minutes of the last movement.

Zubin Mehta remains cautious, too, in his 1985 remake with the Berlin Philharmonic, where, despite some fine moments (largely down to the quality of the playing), it all just feels rather heavy and laborious, with pages of the finale ploughed through with little apparent enjoyment. **Lorin Maazel** and the Vienna Philharmonic offer something much more engaging, recorded live at the Musikverein in 1983. The orchestra's playing is stunningly good and the conductor knows how to make them shine, leaving every nook and cranny of the score sparkling like new. There's a superb élan in the first movement, and clarity and thrust in the *Adagio*, and the finale is a tour de force. But, with clarity and execution having been prioritised, there are moments where one misses the necessary abandon, as well as passages – in the fallow period midway through the *Adagio*,

for example – where the conductor's approach feels overly studied.

ALL THE MOD CONS

I have similar reservations about Maazel's hardly less sparkling Bavarian RSO recording from 1995, despite the virtuosity of the orchestral playing, while **André Previn's** Vienna recording from the same year is a pleasing, slightly stately affair. There's plenty of warmth in the *Adagio* and swagger in the finale, but it nonetheless falls short of conveying the necessary joy and passion – and it's not helped by sound from DG that is a tad opaque. Jumping back a bit, **Neeme Järvi** and the Scottish National Orchestra's 1987 recording is characteristically musical and rewarding, but occasionally feels a little over-smooth in Chandos's engineering. **Gerard Schwarz** conducts a generous and often thrilling account with the Seattle Symphony (luxuriously recorded) in 1988, as does **Edo de Waart** with the Minnesota Orchestra two years later; but both are performances that can lose their sense of forward motion, with Schwarz labouring the final minutes in particular. Vladimir Ashkenazy's scrabbly 1996 live recording with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin can be discounted, while his slightly later recording with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra (Ondine, 6/00), like Wolfgang Sawallisch's handsome 1993 Philadelphia Orchestra recording for EMI, is currently unavailable.

This leaves us with just five recordings made in the last two decades. For all its solid musical qualities, I find **Marek Janowski's** Berlin RSO account too short on fire and

passion. **Antoni Wit** brings a commendable sense of 'rightness' to his recording with the Weimar Staatskapelle, and **Sebastian Weigle's** Frankfurt recording features the qualities of fine, burnished playing and beautifully rounded sound that have defined his cycle of Strauss symphonic poems. But none are as memorable as **François-Xavier Roth's** brilliant recording with the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg, or **David Zinman's** superb account with the Tonhalle Orchestra. For anyone wanting an account that unravels *Symphonia domestica's*

potential knottiness, Roth's is ideal. But for all its lucidity, and although the sound of his terrific SWR orchestra (now sadly lost to structural reorganisation and mergers) is not the richest, one never feels short-changed in terms of passion or fire.

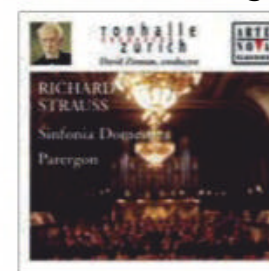
Zinman's recording, however, is the finest of recent accounts to my mind. It received only moderate attention on its release as part of a Strauss cycle brought out with little fanfare on a budget label, but strikes a near ideal balance between swagger and affection, élan and tenderness, all the while keeping a firm hold on the work's structure. The opening sections are full of wit and lightness, the *Adagio* has a grandeur and sweep, and the finale is a roller coaster that delivers the thrills without risking running off the rails – and it's one of the few modern recordings to match Strauss's tempo in the final minutes. Above all, as with my other selected choices, it's an immensely enjoyable recording that might force the work's doubters to give it another chance, and that might cause those who admire it to fall for it anew. **G**

TOP CHOICE

Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra / David Zinman

Arte Nova  74321 98335-2

The most broadly recommendable of all modern recordings, this features a Tonhalle



Orchestra on brilliantly buoyant and virtuosic form in a performance that brings together the work's varied elements into a compellingly enjoyable whole.

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Presenting live concert and opera performances from around the world and reviews of archived music-making available online to stream where you want, when you want

Operavision (free to view)

November 29, December 6 & 13

Operavision doesn't have any live streams this month, but it is presenting three previously recorded recent productions. The first two of these are from this past year: Paul Curran's production for **Garsington Opera** of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, reimagined in the 1950s English countryside and conducted by Jac van Steen; then **Polish National Opera** in Barbara Wysocka's staging of Puccini's *Tosca*. The third, meanwhile, takes us back to the 2018 **Icelandic Opera** performance of Daniel Bjarnason's 2017 opera, *Brothers*, with the composer himself conducting Kasper Holten's staging.

operavision.eu

Philharmonie, Berlin & Digital Concert Hall

November 30; December 7, 14, 15, 21 & 31

It's a packed month of streams from the Berlin Philharmonic, the first four of which are from a tempting array of guest conductors. First up is Verdi's Requiem from **Teodor Currentzis** with the musicAeterna chorus of Perm Opera and soloists **Zarina Abaeva**, **Clémentine Margaine**, **Sergey Romanovsky** and **Evgeny Stavinsky**. Next **Christian Thielemann** directs a Richard Strauss evening featuring soprano **Anja Kampe**, which opens with the Sonatina for 16 Winds No 1 *From the Workshop of an Invalid*, continues with the Three Hymns, Op 71, and concludes with the Suite from *Der Rosenkavalier*. Following that is an evening of dark tales from **Jakub Hrůša**, who precedes Dvořák's *Othello* Overture, Berlioz's *Cléopâtre* (with **Stéphanie d'Oustrac**) and Bartók's *The Miraculous Mandarin* Suite with Miloslav Kabeláč's *Mystery of Time*, a passacaglia for large orchestra. The Berlin Phil then kicks off its festive season the next morning with an educational concert entitled 'Merry QUIZmas' with the orchestra's winds, before we're back to much-loved core repertoire for **Daniel Harding**'s visit, which presents **Frank Peter Zimmermann** as soloist in Beethoven's Violin Concerto, and **Christian Gerhaher** for a selection of Mahler songs from *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*. Chief Conductor **Kirill Petrenko** then leads the orchestra's New Year's Eve performance for the very first time in a jazzy evening headlined by Gershwin's *An American in Paris* and Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*, and, joined by soprano Diana Damrau, for songs from American musicals.

digitalconcerthall.com

ARCHIVE CONCERT REVIEW

Zubin Mehta brings the wisdom of age to Don Quixote in Berlin



Beethoven • R Strauss

Without having announced plans for retirement, the 83-year-old Zubin Mehta has embarked on a round of concerts with orchestras – and repertoire – that have supplied the soundtrack to his 60-year-long career. In November he gave a pair of programmes, prior to a tour to Japan with the Berlin Philharmonic, conducting Richard Strauss's *Don Quixote* and Beethoven's *Eroica* in the first (and Bruckner's Eighth Symphony in the second).

A solidly built *Eroica* is light on repeats, and heavy on behind-the-beat legato in a style that would have come as second nature to a previous generation of Berlin musicians. Where Mehta's collegial style of leadership comes into its own is in *Don Quixote*. 'I have experienced a lot

with that piece,' he says in the accompanying interview, and recalls seeing Casals weeping in the wings as he led a performance with Piatigorsky.

Deutsche Grammophon made a beautifully pointed Berlin concert recording in 2002 with Mischa Maisky (4/04), but this is finer still, more considered, lit much more darkly than his early Decca account in Los Angeles (3/74), and characterised from within like all the best *Don Quixotes* where the soloists are drawn from the orchestra. Mehta sits back in his stool and radiates sovereign authority, while the players take their lead from Ludwig Quandt's gritty and obstinate embodiment of the errant knight-hero, partnered by Amihai Grosz as a magnificently querulous Sancho Panza and Daniel Stabrawa as a Pauline Strauss-like Dulcinea. Strauss didn't do death scenes, but Mehta moulds the coda as a lingering farewell to a cast of characters all the more lovable for their imperfections.

Peter Quantrill

Available via various subscription packages to the Digital Concert Hall, from seven days (€9.90) or one month (€14.90) to 12 months (€149), at digitalconcerthall.com

Konzerthaus Dortmund & Takt1

December 1

Janine Jansen joins the London Symphony Orchestra for this live-streamed guest appearance in Dortmund, performing Bruch's Violin Concerto No 1. **Gianandrea Noseda** conducts, and the Bruch is followed by Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 5. takt1.com

French Institute, London SW7

December 3, 11am

Bertrand Chamayou, the recipient of *Gramophone's* 2019 Concerto and Recording of the Year Awards (for his Erato album of two piano concertos and solo works by Saint-Saëns), joins our Editor-in-Chief and **Nigel Simeone**, an authority on 20th-century French music, to talk about piano music. Chamayou will also perform and sign copies of his album. Tickets are £10, or £15 with CD. institut-francais.org.uk

Wigmore Hall, London, online & medici.tv (free to view)

December 4 & 11

Wigmore Hall has three live streams this month, beginning with two that both fall on December 4 and are streamed on the hall's own website: first, a morning schools' concert titled 'The Science of Sound' with the **Heath Quartet** and presented by **Sam Glazer**, which explores Beethoven's string quartets in the context of exploring how he managed to compose some of his most famous works even after losing his hearing (something which should be as interesting to us adults as to its in-house audience of Key Stage 2 children); then in the evening a Britten-themed programme with **Brett Dean** conducting **Aurora Orchestra**. The latter opens with *Les illuminations* featuring the soprano **Sophie Bevan**, closes with the Serenade (premiered at Wigmore Hall in 1943) with the tenor **Allan Clayton** and horn player

Christopher Parkes, and in between gives us the world premiere of Josephine Stephenson's *Une saison en enfer* written for Clayton, and Arvo Pärt's *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten*. Moving forward to December 11 and we find Medici.tv live-streaming a lunchtime concert by **Xinyuan Wang** who took Third Prize at the 2018 Leeds Piano Competition. wigmores-hall.org.uk, medici.tv

Lincoln Center, New York & online (free to view)

December 4

We're always pleased when we can slip a masterclass into the mix here, so three cheers to the Lincoln Center for live-streaming this Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center masterclass with the pianist and conductor **Jeffrey Kahane** on Bach solo keyboard works. Catch it via ALL ARTS, either on its website, its streaming apps (available for iOS and Android smartphones and tablets) or on Roku, Apple TV and Amazon Fire TV. New York-area residents can also find it on TV channels.

lincolncenter.org/show;
allarts.wliw.org/anywhere

Concertgebouw, Amsterdam & online (free to view)

December 12

The Amsterdam Concertgebouw's Sunday morning live stream this month finds **Nicholas Collon** conducting The Hague's Residentie Orkest in Schumann's Piano Concerto with soloist **Arthur Jussen**, followed by Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* Suite. concertgebouw.nl

Orchestra Hall, Detroit & online (free to view)

December 8 & 15

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra has two live streams this month. First, **Juanjo Mena** visits the orchestra to conduct Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto with soloist **James Ehnes**, preceded by Haydn's *Trauer* Symphony (No 44) and followed by Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony. Then the following week **Ruth Reinhardt** leads the orchestra plus the AUDIVI Chorus in Handel's *Messiah*, with soloists **Deanna Breiwick**, **Eve Gigliotti**, **Jonathan Johnson** and **Russell Braun**. livefromorchestrahall.vhx.tv

Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg & online (free to view)

December 12

The music of Shostakovich's friend – and centenarian this year – Mieczysław Weinberg (see David Fanning's feature about the composer on page 20) gets an airing in this NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra performance under the guest baton of **Krzysztof Urbański**, and specifically Symphony No 3, into which he incorporated folk music from Poland and Belarus. This is preceded by a concerto which likewise sees its composer exploring his attachment to his native country: Sibelius's Violin Concerto, with soloist **Joshua Bell**. Opening the concert meanwhile is Ligeti's *Atmosphères*, and note that this concert isn't being streamed on the Elbphilharmonie website itself, but instead via its Facebook page and on ARTE.

elbphilharmonie.de; arte.tv, en-gb.facebook.com/elbphilharmonie.hamburg

Grieghallen, Bergen (free to view)

December 13

This visit to Bergen by the Seattle Symphony's former Music Director **Ludovic Morlot** finds him conducting the Nordic premiere of John Luther Adams's orchestral seascape of 2013, *Become Ocean* (its title referring to the possibility of the world 'becoming ocean' once more, as a result of climate crisis). This concert, with lighting by Ivar Skjørestad, forms part of the Bergen Philharmonic's NEXT STEPS series, examining the world around us. Two further watery depictions precede *Become Ocean*: first, Mendelssohn's *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, then Wagner's Sunrise and Rhine Journey from *Götterdämmerung*.

bergenphilive.no

Trinity Wall Street, New York & online (free to view)

December 20, 21 & 22

If you want to enjoy a period-instrument *Messiah* from your sofa this month then look no further than Trinity Church Wall Street, which in 1770 put on one of the first American performances of the oratorio, and whose annual period-instrument interpretation has these days become something of a New York institution. **Julian Wachner** conducts the Choir of Trinity Wall Street and Trinity Baroque Orchestra in three performances, the second of which is being live-streamed on the church's website and Facebook page before being made available for on-demand viewing.

trinitywallstreet.org;
facebook.com/TrinityWallSt;
trinitywallstreet.org/videos/music

ARCHIVE OPERA REVIEW

Franz Welser-Möst conducts *Die Fledermaus* at the Vienna State Opera with a fine cast and a great orchestra

J Strauss II

Die Fledermaus from the Vienna Staatsoper: tradition is what you expect. And tradition is exactly what you get in this affectionate revival of Otto Schenk's antique production. We're in late 19th-century Vienna, and Günther Schneider-Siemssen's designs are a confection of potted plants, velvet swags and ostrich feathers. Only the faded colours and drab, static lighting suggest that this is a production that dates from the 1970s.

But everyone here does at least seem to be having fun. The video direction lets you see every deepening furrow and bead of sweat on the brow of Kurt Streit's Eisenstein: an ageing playboy, entertainingly out of his depth, and sung essentially as a character role. Rainer Trost deploys maximum tenor warmth



as Alfred, and it's easy to see why Rosalinde (Michaela Kaune, positively imperious in her Act 2 Csárdás) might prefer him. With her slightly nasal upper register, she's audibly cut from the same cloth as Adele (Daniela Fally, in bright soubrette mode) – and just as amusingly flirtatious.

Zoryana Kushpler is a feline, faintly sinister Orlofsky (those high notes are blood-curdling), and if Act 3 is heavy-going, the drunken antics of Alfred Šramek's jowly, growly Frank are sufficient to keep your finger off the fast-forward button. The chorus stands around looking decorative and the orchestral playing is consistently lovely, though Franz Welser-Möst's

generally steady tempos mean that the overall feeling is more Glühwein than Champagne. But hey, 'Wien bleibt Wien'. It's a Staatsoper *Fledermaus* and it does exactly what it says on the tin.

Richard Bratby

Available to view for free at operavision.eu until December 24, 2019

ORANGES & LEMONS

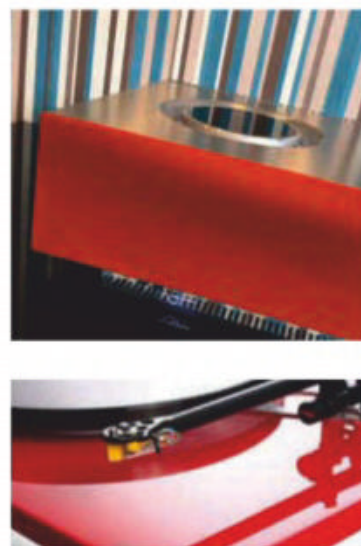
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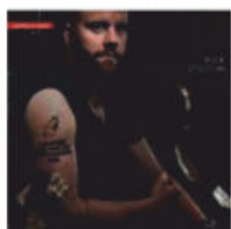
● THE TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES THE MOST OF YOUR MUSIC ●



THIS MONTH The very best of the year's audio equipment, affordable hi-fi separates from Cambridge Audio – and has Amazon stirred things up with its Music HD service?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

DECEMBER TEST DISCS



This set from double bassist Rick Stotijn is as superb-sounding as it is musically innovative, with sonorous low frequencies in formats up to DSD512.



Does the world need another *Planets*? It does when it's a sparkling and well considered as this Kansas City SACD release on Reference Recordings.

From multiroom music to cleaner records

A selection of products this month showing the diversity of ways to enjoy music

British-based Arcam hasn't launched any new home cinema products for a while but is making up for lost time with its latest announcement, comprising three new AV receivers, an AV processor and a trio of power amplifiers **1**. The range starts with the £2299 AVR10, which, like the other models, is designed for the extended 3D sound of Dolby Atmos and DTS:X, and has Dirac room optimisation and all the channels of amplification required for the latest surround formats built-in – in this case 12 channels of Class AB amps. Network streaming, with GoogleCast, is also included, and the receiver can be controlled with the company's MusicLife and Control apps. The £2999 AVR20 extends the specification to 16 channels of Class AV amplification, while the AVR30 also has 16 channels, this time using the Class G technology found in the company's flagship stereo amplifiers. The AV40 processor/pre-amp offers all the facilities of the receivers, along with 16 XLR outputs, 16 single-ended RCA outputs, seven HDMI inputs and three outputs, plus an integrated FM/DAB/DAB+ radio tuner. It sells for £3749 and is designed to be used with the three new power amplifiers: the £1999 PA240 delivers 2x380W using Class G technology and can be bridged into a 790W mono amp; the PA410 (£1299) is a 4x70W Class AB model and the PA720 is a £2499 seven-channel design, delivering 140W per channel from its Class G amplification.

Another UK-based company, Bowers & Wilkins, has expanded its Formation Suite of wireless multiroom speakers with the £399 Formation Flex **2**, the most compact

model in the range. Standing just 13cm tall, it can be used singly, paired up for stereo or used as a rear speaker in a surround system based around the Formation Bar. It uses the company's Decoupled Double Dome Tweeter, as found in the 600 Series speakers, and like the other Formation Suite models works on a dedicated wireless mesh network for perfect synchronisation and high-resolution audio.

B&W has also been busy working on its headphone range **3**, with four new wireless models. The on-ear PX5 (£270) and over-ear PX7 (£350) models have the company's latest adaptive active noise cancellation, long battery life and fast charging, while the £170 PI3 and £270 PI4 are in-ear designs, with the PI4 also having active noise cancellation. The PX5 will play for 25 hours on a single charge, with a 15-minute quick charge giving an extra three hours' use, while the PX7 is good for 30 hours, with a five-hour top-up in 15 minutes, and has a proximity sensor to pause play when an earcup is lifted. The PI3 will play for eight hours, with a two-hour quick top-up, and the PI4 is good for 10 hours, with three hours' extra from a 15-minute charge.

Roon has upgraded its Nucleus core devices, designed to sit at the heart of a system using the innovative library/playback software **4**. The new Nucleus and Nucleus+ devices come in wider, shallower casework and are now manufactured in California. Despite the slimmer design, the units will now

accommodate 15mm-deep hard drives, rather than the super-slim 9mm drives required by the old design. Pricing is unchanged: the Nucleus, which is based around an Intel Core i3 processor, is £1500, and the Nucleus+, which uses a more powerful i7 processor and is better suited for large libraries and more complex set-ups, is £2500.

The Canadian audio company Bryston has launched its BDA-3.14 multifunction streaming DAC **5**, which plays music from USB drives, network music storage and streaming services, as well as being Roon-ready. Selling for £3900, its digital inputs include four HDMI, asynchronous USB for computer connection, AES/EBU, coaxial and digital, and it can handle data at up to 384kHz/32-bit and quad DSD. Each format is handled in its native resolution to maintain bit-perfect working, and the analogue section includes a volume control, so the BDA-3.14 can be used straight into a power amp, functioning as a digital player/pre-amp.

Finally, new record cleaners from Project **6**, starting at just £299 for the entry-level VC-E, with the VC-S2 ALU (£399) replacing the VC-S Mk II. Both models feature improved cabinets and clamps, with easier operation and lower noise. The VC-E is a compact model, and like the full-size VC-S2 ALU uses a faster turntable, making a rotation in just two seconds, and an improved vacuum system to clean a disc in just a couple of rotations. **6**



● THE YEAR'S BEST HI-FI BUYS

Drawing on a year of hi-fi reviewing, Audio Editor **Andrew Everard** suggests a shortlist of products, from headphones to high-end

While the hi-fi industry isn't given to excessive joy and jollity, with many choosing to suck their teeth and hark back to the glory days of distant memory, the fact is that we're living in an age where the options open to the music lover are greater than ever, from streaming services to speakers, and from headphones to high-resolution music. For someone brought up in an age when radio was either heard or missed, and taking music with you meant a Sony Walkman and a bunch of home-recorded cassettes held together with a stout rubber band, the sheer availability of music and other audio content is revolutionary.

Finding myself clearing a house the other week and realising it was just too quiet, I quickly found Radio 3 on my phone using the BBC Sounds app and was able to access some of those *In Tune Mixtape* episodes I'd missed – perfect. And I love it when the Roon software on my computer follows up on something I've been playing with its 'Radio' feature, serving up something it thinks I'll like from my own music library, or from Qobuz or Tidal. It doesn't always get it right – and its logic is sometimes hard to fathom – but it's never less than fascinating.

Just as exciting has been the range of equipment passing through my listening room and across my desk of late. Some of it has been traditional hi-fi of the CD player/amplifier/speakers kind but there's also been a plethora of 'new music' devices, or those combining old and new technologies

to fine effect. Based on a year of listening and past experience, allow me to make some suggestions (with prices correct at the time of writing).

CD PLAYERS



Contrary to popular rumours, the CD isn't dead. The huge numbers sold over the lifetime of the format, and the fact that new ones continue to be released, make sure of that.

For affordable players, look no further than the **Cambridge Audio AXC35** machine (see page 150), which does everything anyone could need – including having a digital output for future upgrades – for a very reasonable £299. If you can do without the digital out, for example if you won't want to connect the player to an external digital-to-analogue converter, you can buy the AXC25 machine instead, saving £70.

If you do have a DAC, or an amplifier with a digital input, then the £379 **Audiolab 6000CDT** is a cost-effective step up for CD playback. It's only a CD transport, with no onboard digital-to-analogue conversion – the matching 6000A (£599) has digital inputs – but it's been designed to deliver the best possible digital signal.

If you want to play your CDs while at the same time investigating the world of music streaming, then try the **Marantz ND8006**,

at £1099. Designed as a 'Complete Digital Music Source', it combines the functions of CD and network music player, with access to online services as well as your own computer-stored collection, and can even be connected directly to a computer for playback. It's a very comprehensive package and the perfect bridge between old and new.

Taking this thinking even further, the **Naim Uniti Star**, at £3499, is a complete 'just add speakers' system, able to play CDs as well as network and online music content, and can even rip CDs to USB or network storage using its built-in disc drive. Control is via Naim's app on a tablet or smartphone, and as well as sounding superb the Naim is quite a looker.

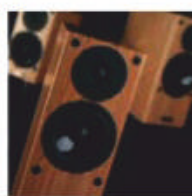
NETWORK PLAYERS



If you want to stream your music, from either local storage on a computer or a dedicated NAS device connected to your home network, there's now a huge selection of equipment available. You can start with something as simple and affordable as **Yamaha's WXAD-10** wireless music streamer, at just £170, or **Audiolab's 6000N Play** (£449), which connect to your home network and your existing audio system to play locally stored music and also access online music services such as Spotify and Tidal. Controlled from an app, they're simple and intuitive to use, and the Yamaha has the benefit of also working with other products in the company's huge MusicCast range, allowing the creation of a complete multiroom music system if required.

Multiroom is also what the **Bluesound** range does, and at its heart is the **Bluesound Vault 2i**, at £1099, which is both a network player and a CD ripping/storage unit. Copy your CDs to its hard drive and you can find them for instant playback whenever you want, while also enjoying online services.

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TURNTABLES



The resurgence of interest in vinyl shows no sign of abating, and it's still possible to find treasure on LP everywhere from specialist second-hand retailers to charity shops. If you want to find out what all the fuss is about, try turntables like the £289 **Pro-Ject T1 Phono SB**, which comes complete with

electronic speed change, a built-in phono stage and a pickup cartridge pre-installed, meaning you can plug it into any amplifier. Pro-Ject is a major player in the whole vinyl revival and arguably kickstarted it with its original model, and this player draws on all that experience to deliver a high-quality sound without all the fiddly set-up.

Another legendary name is **Technics**, with its vast experience in direct-drive turntables, delivering ease of use and rock-solid engineering. Its latest range includes models costing many thousands of pounds but its entry-level Technics SL-1500C includes much of the same engineering, plus a pre-installed cartridge and onboard phono stage, for a more affordable £899.

AMPLIFIERS



Every system needs an amplifier, and as the £299 **Cambridge Audio AXA35** (see page 150) shows, you can still

buy an amp with a high standard of performance for very sensible money.

NAD has an enviable reputation for cost-effective amplifiers, its 3020 of some decades back being a runaway sales success and starting many listeners on the hi-fi path. Its £799 NAD368 offers superb performance for the money thanks to the company's innovative engineering, and is exceptionally flexible. It has both digital and analogue inputs as standard, and can be fitted with a BluOS module to convert it into a network streaming solution, to which other NAD and Bluesound products can be added to create a whole-home entertainment system.

Keeping things much simpler is the super-slimline **Naim Nait XS 3**, a frill-free design that's all about compelling music-making. Selling for £2199, it's the result of an extensive upgrade earlier this year, including the addition of an excellent moving magnet phono stage for your turntable.

LOUDSPEAKERS



I'm always a little reluctant to suggest speakers, as which ones are right for you is as much a matter of personal taste as matching the sound to the acoustics of your room. However, there are some standout models at the moment, not the least of which is the entry-level D300 series from **Wharfedale**. Already fine value, the line-up had its pricing reduced earlier this year. As a result, the smallest model, the Wharfedale D301, is just £129 a pair, while the powerful-sounding D303 floorstanders are an even greater bargain at £349/pr. Also fine value, and very sharp-looking to match its enhanced sound, is the 600 Series from **Bowers & Wilkins**, with even the tiny 607 model, at £399, delivering a big, rich sound, with particularly impressive bass for a speaker just 30cm tall.

Bowers & Wilkins has also been making news with its brand-new wireless multiroom speakers, the Formation Suite. The £899 Formation Edge is a unique 120-degree speaker array designed to fill an entire room with stereo sound from a single enclosure, while the flagship Formation Duo, at £3499/pr, combines the company's 'house style' and technology with the same wireless mesh technology for accurate hi-res wireless sound used throughout the Formation range.

DACS AND HEADPHONE AMPLIFIERS



With so much music on computers and smartphones these days, there's a boom in compact digital-to-analogue converters with built-in headphone amplifiers, designed to improve music on the move as well as interfacing between computers and hi-fi systems. There's no better place to start than the excellent little **Shanling UP2** (£79), reviewed last month. It's tiny, will fit in any pocket and can either be used as a Bluetooth DAC/headphone amplifier with a smartphone or tablet, or connected via its USB-C socket to your computer. Best of all, it sounds excellent across a wide range of music, and will run for 12 hours or so on a single charge. Yes, it could do with a battery level indicator to show you when charging time is looming, but apart from that it's huge fun.

Moving things on a bit is the fine **Audioquest Dragonfly Cobalt**, the latest and most ambitious in the American company's 'DAC in a stick' range. Selling for £269, it handles a wide range of file

formats and delivers a sound to shame many bigger – and more expensive – rivals.

Finally, one of the best-loved DACs on the market, the **Chord Electronics Mojo**, selling for £399. Using much of the technology of the company's very expensive flagship models, clad in a solid metal case with brightly lit controls, this is a superb-sounding DAC made pocket-size – and you can add to it the company's bolt-on Poly player (£499) for music stored on memory cards or from network sources, creating a truly transportable complete system.

HEADPHONES



When it comes to traditional headphones, **Grado** has an enviable reputation, its designs mixing retro styling with excellent performance. At the entry level of its range, the SR80e (£109) is the latest iteration of an acclaimed on-ear design, with drivers, housings and cables all improved to give a rich yet open and detailed sound, and is also light enough to carry and wear everywhere.

Sennheiser is another of the world's best-known headphone companies, as well as being the maker of microphones used for live performances and recording, and its £89 Momentum 2.0 IE in-ear headphones deliver all that expertise in a compact form for go-anywhere listening. Milled from solid stainless steel, they're durable enough for everyday use, come with comfortable ear-tips to fit any ear and have a handy three-button inline remote and microphone for use with smartphones.

Advanced noise-cancelling technology joins wireless Bluetooth earphones in the £219 **Sony WF-1000XM3**, which combines discrete wireless receivers in each earpiece for a truly cable-free experience, and the company's HD Noise Cancelling Processor QN1e, which monitors external sound and then removes it using 24-bit digital processing. That means you're just left with the music, wherever you are, while the earphones have a six-hour playtime, plus a charging case able to recharge them three more times from a single USB charge.

Finally, if you're after sheer luxury in a pair of headphones, not to mention a superb sound, look no further than the excellent **Bowers & Wilkins P9 Signature** (£699), using new driver technology developed by the team behind the company's 800 Series Diamond speakers, and a structure made from lightweight aluminium and Italian Saffiano leather. Not only are they beautiful and supremely comfortable in use, they also deliver breathtaking sound. **G**

● REVIEW CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AXC35/AXA35

Honest sound at honest prices

Part of the latest entry-level range from the British-based company, there's something old fashioned about this pairing – both in features and value

Of late, London-based Cambridge Audio has perhaps been best-known among hi-fi enthusiasts for its undeniably ambitious, slick-looking and – as far as I have heard so far – very impressive-sounding Edge series. Aimed straight at the established high-end brands, these substantial components – an integrated amplifier, a network player/pre-amp and a power amp – are something of a leap in the dark for the brand, taking it into very unfamiliar territory.

Mind you, that isn't the only area in which the company operates. It also makes speakers, both wired and wireless, AV receivers, in-ear headphones and cables – there are even a £1500 direct-drive turntable and a £450 skeletal moving coil cartridge in the catalogue.

The AXC35 CD player and AXA35 integrated amplifier we have here are tempting enough at £299 apiece but even these aren't the most affordable models: the AXC25 and AXA25 fill that role, selling for a remarkable £229 each. What's even more remarkable is that, even at the low prices, we're a fair distance from the way certain Cambridge Audio products of a decade or so back were: admittedly the company said it spent all the money on the audio circuits and not on the cosmetics, but some of those early models had something of the biscuit tin about them, with casework that wasn't what you'd call well-damped.

No such problems here. The -35 models have an impressive solidity about them, from their styling and build to the way the controls operate. Yes, they're kept simple; but the volume control on the amplifier operates smoothly and the little buttons used on both products for the main operational controls are well finished and click reassuringly.

The AXA25 makes do with conventional knobs for volume, input selection and so on, while the pricier (!) AXA35 looks rather more grown-up with a display and a menu system, creating a much less cluttered fascia. The display shows input and volume levels as a default, while pressing the 'menu' button beside the volume control will allow access to bass, treble and balance functions.

As the model numbers suggest, the AXA35 is more powerful than its junior counterpart, delivering 35Wpc into



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AXC35

Type CD player

Price £299

Plays CD; MP3/WMA on CD-R/RW/ROM

Outputs Stereo analogue, coaxial digital

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x7.5x30.5cm

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AXA35

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £299

Power output 35Wx2 into 8 ohms

Inputs Moving magnet phono, four line

Outputs 1pr speakers, headphones, line out

Other connections USB Type A 5V power for accessories

Tone controls Yes

Accessories supplied Remote handset

Dimensions (WxHxD) 43x8.5x33.5cm

cambridgeaudio.com

8 ohms rather than 25Wpc. While those figures may seem low, they're more than adequate to drive most speakers likely to be used with amps at this price to serious levels in all but the largest rooms. Keep things sensible, with standmount or even floorstanding models of reasonable sensitivity, and you won't go far wrong.

The -35 models have an impressive solidity, from their styling and build to the way the controls operate

What also sets the AXA35 apart is the provision of a more than respectable moving magnet phono stage for a turntable, along with four line inputs, one of which is duplicated on – and overridden by – a 3.5mm 'aux' input socket on the front panel. There's also a USB Type A socket on the rear of the amp, but this is purely to power an external device such as a Bluetooth receiver and has no audio input capability.

Speaker output is on a single set of colour-coded terminals, there's a line analogue output and a headphone socket is provided on the front panel. The remote handset supplied will also control an AXC25 or AXC35 CD player.

On which subject, the player itself is as simple as they come. It's a pure CD player, also able to handle MP3 and WMA files burnt on to finalised CD-R and CD-RW discs; and in addition to analogue stereo outputs, it gains a coaxial digital out over the AXC25. Like the amplifier, it has a user-configurable Auto Power Down circuit to save energy, and in common with all Cambridge products the socket labelling is repeated upside down at the top of the rear panel, which is handy when one is peering over the unit to make connections.

PERFORMANCE

At the top of my listening notes for this duo is a single word: 'Honesty'. I'm sticking by that assessment of the Cambridge Audio duo – they don't challenge much more expensive components or rearrange one's whole perception of budget hi-fi, but for what is after all very reasonable money they deliver an excellent sound, and fine communication with the music. Yes, in absolute terms the bass here is somewhat dry, lacking a little of that satisfying richness – though admittedly this is more the case when playing CDs than with other sources through the amplifier – and the phono input has a particularly smooth and integrated presentation, but there's good definition in the bass, making orchestral rhythms especially attractive.

At the top end, things are slightly smoothed off by the amplifier, though the CD player used alone sounds rather bright and light. Together, the two produce a sound that's not the last word in ambience and atmosphere, with concert-hall acoustics more hinted at than made explicit, but again this is only really apparent when comparing the two with much more expensive components.

Listened to in isolation, the Cambridge pairing gets all the essentials of the music right and makes listening exceptionally enjoyable. Partner them with a cost-effective pair of speakers and you'll have a very decent set-up. **G**

● ESSAY

Now the streaming music battle really is joined

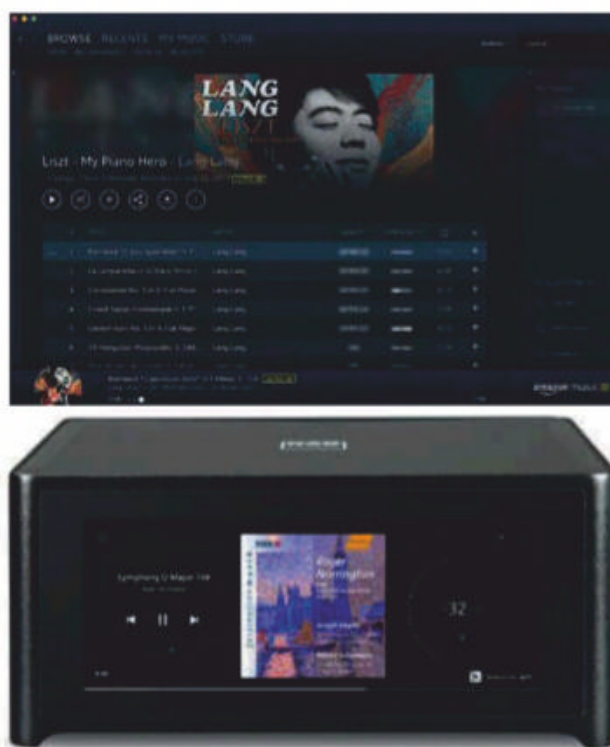
With the arrival of Amazon in the lossless audio arena, the pressure is on the established players – and the hardware companies – to up their game

For a long time, those watching the online music-streaming market have been wondering what the next big thing would be. Would Spotify improve its service to offer CD-quality music, and would Apple follow suit? More to the point would anyone emerge to challenge Tidal, with its MQA-based high-resolution offering, the excellent (if to some expensive) Qobuz Studio subscription, or other high-quality services such as HighResAudio and the classical-specific services Idagio Premium+ and Primephonic Platinum?

Well, the answer came in the middle of September in the form of Amazon's new Music HD, available at a lower price than the established rivals, with sound quality to beat Spotify hands down and worry Tidal, and with the advantage of a name familiar to millions worldwide. I'm not sure I'd agree with veteran rocker Neil Young, who went on record as saying that Amazon Music HD 'changed the Earth for ever', but then one has learnt to take Young's proclamations on the state of the music business with a sizeable pinch of salt. After all, his Pono player was going to shake the music industry to its core, but didn't – it's been relegated to the role of audio curiosity. What is unavoidable, however, is that with the arrival of Amazon in the lossless audio arena, now the streaming music battle is really joined and the established online brands will have to up their game, while some audio hardware manufacturers will again find themselves playing catch-up, as they do whenever a new format or service emerges.

Admittedly Amazon has muddled the pool a bit with the choice of labelling of the tracks and albums it offers: 'HD' means files at CD quality, not the 'beyond CD' formats most of the industry indicates when it uses the term. The Amazon thinking is clearly that, for listeners used to lossy formats such as MP3 – which until the new service appeared was all Amazon offered – CD quality is high definition, or at least higher definition.

Yes, there are 'beyond CD' albums available on the Amazon Music HD service, in file formats from 44.1kHz/24-bit all the way up to 192kHz/24-bit, but they're designated as 'Ultra HD'. Oh, and if whatever you're using is either set – or limited – to CD quality, that's what you'll



Amazon's Music HD service may cause a shake-up in the online music-streaming world – Bluesound was an early adopter with models such as NAD's BluOS-equipped M10

get, even if you select the 'Ultra HD' version of the music you want to play. On the plus side, the pricing is the same whatever format you play, unlike some services where you pay one price for CD quality, and more for what most of us understand as HD music.

The sound quality, both with CD-quality files and at much higher resolutions, was extremely good

On the subject of pricing, Amazon Music HD undercuts the established hi-res rivals. After a free trial period of 90 days for newcomers or 30 days for existing Amazon Music users, the price is £14.99 a month, or £149 for a year's subscription. Amazon Prime members save £2 a month, or £20 a year. That compares favourably with Tidal Hi-Fi's £19.99/mth, while Qobuz is the same price for its 44.1kHz/16-bit Hi-Fi service or £24.99/mth for its Studio service, offering streams at up to 192kHz/24-bit. Like Amazon, Qobuz offers discounts on annual subscriptions, equivalent to paying for 10 months and getting two more free.

Of course, any such offering stands or falls on the depth of its offering, and

Amazon claims to have 50m+ songs – that's how streaming services measure these things – in 'HD', and 'millions of songs' in 'Ultra HD'. Looking at the service in the early days following its launch, classical albums proved a little hard to track down, with an apparent preponderance of 'crossover' titles and compilations, while a search for 'classical' pulled up far too many 'classic' rock and pop titles. Dig a little deeper, however, and the music was there to be found, both in 'HD' and 'Ultra HD'.

For many, however, the question will be one of how to listen to the service, assuming you want to go beyond listening on your computer speakers or a pair of headphones plugged into your smartphone or tablet. Well, the good news is that, at launch, Amazon already had some major names either on board or committed to be so. For example, the service will play on HEOS wireless speakers and Denon/Marantz devices with HEOS integration; Bluesound announced that its BluOS products will play it; Sonos wireless multiroom is in; and the likes of McIntosh and Sennheiser are also on board. Amazon Alexa-enabled devices are compatible, as are iPhones, iPads and Android smartphones/tablets, but these will only support formats up to 48kHz: play higher-res files and they'll be downsampled to suit.

To sample the service I used my Mac Mini fed into a USB DAC, and thence to my hi-fi system, using Amazon's Music HD app and with the computer's USB output set to accommodate the service's highest resolution, and I have to say the sound quality, both with CD-quality files and those offering much higher resolutions, was extremely good. The hi-res files were more than a match for Tidal Masters, for example, and like all the Amazon HD Music content they're delivered in industry-standard FLAC. That should make it relatively easy for manufacturers of hi-fi hardware to integrate it into their equipment, which should provide an even smoother experience for those more used to such products than taking the 'Mac and DAC' route.

Do we need another streaming service? That's arguable; but what's not in doubt is that Amazon has the clout to make Music HD work. It could just be the beginning of a streaming shake-up. **G**

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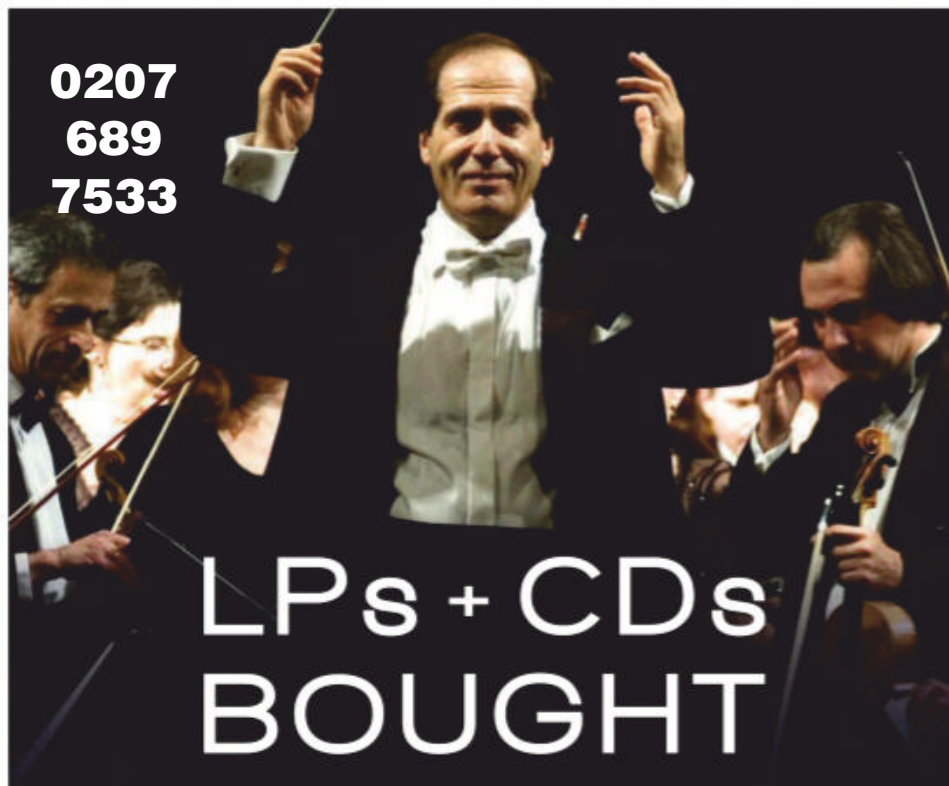


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NOTES & LETTERS

Norman's 'soprano-mezzo' • Oistrakh and Klemperer • Dame Emma • Campoli's Mendelssohn

Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

Jessye Norman remembered

A propos Mark Pullinger's excellent tribute (November, page 10) to the late Jessye Norman, referring to 'pigeon-holing' voices, your late critic John Steane coined the term 'soprano-mezzo' to describe voices that are basically soprano but have almost the full range of a mezzo. Victoria de los Angeles was another example he gave. In his collection of essays *Voices, Singers and Critics* (Duckworth: 1992) he quotes Rosa Ponselle as saying how much she envied such voices: 'How I wanted to sing such parts ... without worrying about the next high C coming up'.

Dr Roger Brown

Southampton, Hants

Campoli's Mendelssohn

Charlotte Gardner's survey of recordings of the Mendelssohn Concerto (Awards, page 140) was, for me, missing one crucial violinist – Alfredo Campoli. I grew up with his 1949 recording with Eduard van Beinum. With the advent of CD I bought his 1958 Mendelssohn, with Boult, and marvelled again at his purity of tone and beauty of phrasing, and his scintillating technique in the last movement. His has remained my favourite Mendelssohn for well over 50 years.

Hywel Jenkins, via email

Oistrakh and Klemperer

Tully Potter's writing is always a joy and his 'Icons' article on David Oistrakh (Awards, page 86) was no exception.

In contrast to his rather uneasy relations with Menuhin (temperamentally the two were polar opposites), Otto Klemperer greatly admired and respected Oistrakh. In 1960 they made a recording together in Paris of the Brahms Violin Concerto which has for many years been regarded as a classic. Not only is the rapport between conductor and soloist obvious, but the playing that Klemperer draws from what was far from a premier orchestra is remarkable. A couple of years later, Oistrakh began to conduct in public, as Tully Potter notes. Peter Heyworth, in the second volume of his biography of Klemperer, mentions an amusing incident that took place in Vienna in 1968 when the two men met again. By this time Klemperer was well aware of Oistrakh's secondary

Letter of the Month

Congratulations to Dame Emma!

It's wonderful to see Dame Emma win *Gramophone's* Lifetime Achievement Award! Over the years we have enjoyed her silvery tone, searching artistry and intelligent interpretations. Fortunately, she also recorded extensively. With the help of these records, her vocal art will surely carry on winning admiration for generations to come.

Her unique, direct simplicity and intelligent choices for repertoire may be the secret for her long singing career. As Nicholas Kenyon writes (Awards, page 21), she remained true to the character of her voice, and didn't press too far forward into the Classical and Romantic eras. However, together with the late Christopher Hogwood, she *did* record Stravinsky's Shakespeare Songs, and passages from *The Rake's Progress* (Arte Nova); Anne Trulove has long been a role championed by Baroque-specialist sopranos, yet the sadness and nobility of love in Dame Emma's contribution remain uniquely memorable.

For many who have been fortunate enough to see and hear Dame Emma perform in the flesh, she will perhaps be remembered most vividly as having



Lifetime Achievement winner Dame Emma Kirkby

a lute accompanying her. When her crystal voice echoes in the air, one is immediately blessed with her attentive concentration, and the pure beauty of her timbre. Simple as it may seem, the emotional impact can be electrifying. I would like to express hearty congratulations on her deserved win, and *Gramophone's* timely decision.

Wei-Chin Chen

Taipei, Taiwan

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career, although his estimation of him as a conductor is not known. Klemperer was renowned for his mordant wit, especially when employed as a put-down, and it may be that Oistrakh anticipated this. Upon meeting, Klemperer's first words were that it was a pleasure to be able to greet Oistrakh as a colleague. The great violinist replied: 'I didn't know that you now play the violin!'

Keith Pearce

Penzance, Cornwall

Editorial notes

In November (page 84) we stated that the recording of Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* is no longer available. It is in fact available on Retrospect Opera RO004 (7/18).

In Peter Quantrill's review of Tom Winpenny's Naxos recording of Messiaen's *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (November, page 68), the recording engineer was named as Adrian Lucas; in fact the 'excellent recording' was engineered by Sveinn Kjartansson.

OBITUARIES

A much-recorded Italian baritone and an admired recording engineer

ROLANDO PANERAI

Baritone

Born October 17, 1924

Died October 23, 2019



'It is best to sing well and not become big-headed – the rest comes all by itself' was, in 1996, the advice to students of the Italian baritone Rolando Panerai, who

sang on some of the most famous opera recordings of the 20th century and excelled in Verdi and the comic Italian repertoire. He sang more than 150 roles at leading international opera houses throughout his 65-year operatic career and appeared frequently with Maria Callas in her prime.

Born in Campi Bisenzio near Florence on October 17, 1924, Panerai trained in Florence and Milan, made his stage debut as Enrico (*Lucia*) in 1946 in his home town and his professional debut at the Teatro San Carlo in Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto* while still in his early twenties. Before he was 30 he was already achieving success in more mature roles such as Verdi's Simon Boccanegra and Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* (with which he made the first of many appearances at La Scala). He was soon to prove a skilful comedian, too, as Rossini's and Mozart's (and Paisiello's) Figaros, Puccini's Gianni Schicchi, and Donizetti's Dulcamara and Belcore. Twice he recorded Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff* for Herbert von Karajan (in 1956 and 1980), and also for Leonard Bernstein opposite Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau's Falstaff in 1966. He also sang the title-role in the opera (in his sixties) for Colin Davis's studio recording.

Radiotelevisione italiana's 1951 commemorations of the 50th anniversary of Verdi's death included several of the composer's early works for broadcast, and brought Panerai into working contact with Maria Callas and Giuseppe di Stefano. This led to an important sequence of recordings, many for Columbia, conducted by Karajan and produced by Walter Legge. These included Karajan's first and second *Bohèmes*; two *Böhm Cosès* (again with two roles, first Guglielmo then Alfonso); Patanè's *Gianni Schicchi*; Karajan's and Callas's *Trovatore* and live 1955 Berlin *Lucia*; a Giulini *Barbiere* broadcast from London's ROH; and the Barbirolli

Madama Butterfly with Renata Scottò.

Although not promoted as a star as widely as some contemporaries, Panerai became essentially the go-to Italian baritone for major repertoire recordings. In addition there had been an unexpected venture into Wagner – Amfortas in an Italian-language *Parsifal* conducted by Vittorio Gui, also starring Callas as Kundry.

Panerai was not a great lover of more contemporary scores but professional duty took him into the Italian premieres of works by Hindemith and Prokofiev and the creation of roles by Ildebrando Pizzetti, Renzo Rossellini, Guido Turchi and Menotti. On film and for TV he appeared in an early *Barbiere di Siviglia* for Italian television and as Giorgio Germont in *La traviata*, filmed on location in Paris in 2000 and conducted by Zubin Mehta. In later years he made several forays into directing. These included *Gianni Schicchi* in Genoa, in which – in 2011 at the age of 87 – he made his last appearance in the title-role. **Mike Ashman**

MIKE SHEADY

Recording engineer

Born December 9, 1945

Died October 8, 2019



Mike Sheady joined Abbey Road Studios in 1964 as a tea boy and worked at EMI for 35 years. The 1960s was an incredibly fertile time for recording at Abbey Road and Mike began assisting on as many pop sessions as classical.

It was the EMI producer Suvi Raj Grubb who encouraged Mike to work more in classical music and begin engineering sessions. Mike started balancing classical recordings as the Abbey Road mobiles developed and he embarked on a career that would take him around the world recording many of the greatest conductors and instrumentalists of the day. In 1987 he won the *Gramophone* Engineering Award for his Mahler Symphony No 2 recording with Rattle and the CBSO.

Mike was highly respected by his peers for his instinctive feeling for sound, and the artists loved the passion he brought to their recordings. **Jonathan Allen**
For the complete, unabridged versions of both obituaries, visit gramophone.co.uk/news

NEXT MONTH
JANUARY 2020



Beethoven 250: a history of recordings

We kick off Beethoven's big anniversary year with Richard Osborne's exploration of how the gramophone has preserved the work of those musicians who have borne witness to the composer's genius

The Hammerklavier: which to own?

Jed Distler trawls through the numerous recordings of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 29 and recommends his favourite

Meeting Joshua Bell

As the Academy of St Martin in the Fields gears up for its 60th anniversary, Charlotte Gardner meets its inspiring Music Director

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



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

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Nick Higham

The former BBC Arts and Media correspondent on Semele and sea shanties

I was introduced to music by my father who had quite a collection of discs of Mozart and Bach, and who used to take me to hear choral music – the *St John Passion*, *St Matthew Passion*, *Messiah*, those kind of standard works. That accustomed me to the sound, and also I think probably made me a snob because I thought ‘this is good stuff this, so much better than pop music’ – which was very unfair because the late 1960s early ’70s was a very innovative time actually for pop music.

I was very lucky in my first year at university to have a room next to Paul Mayhew-Archer, a writer and now performer of comedy. He spent many years writing *The Vicar of Dibley*, though was diagnosed a few years ago with Parkinson’s and has now devised a one-man comedy show about it. He had a wonderful record collection, and he used to sit me down and say: ‘Listen to this. When was it written? Who was it written by?’ And that’s a very good way to develop an understanding of the way music changes over time, or of national styles, and that kind of thing. He gave me a very useful grounding in a wide range of classical music.

Later, also at university, I was introduced to the music of people like Purcell. I vividly remember the first time I heard a recording of *Come ye sons of Art*, with James Bowman, and was blown away. That led on to Handel. The interest in opera came later and was a branch of an interest in theatre. I love live performance, but had shied away from going to opera for many years because it was so expensive. I liked particularly going to ENO, because they sang in English and that to me is quite important – being able to understand the words, and understand at first hand the drama, what’s happening on stage. One reason I like Handel in particular is that his oratorios – several of which are readily staged, there isn’t that much difference between a Handel opera and Handel oratorio – are in English for the most part. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve seen *Semele* – it’s become a fetish now, every time somebody puts on *Semele* we go and see it, just in order to say we have seen *Semele* in Paris, and in Brussels ... we baulked at going to San Diego though, that’s quite a long way! The most recent time was at the Alexandra Palace theatre.

I find orchestral music in the concert hall less appealing. I’m not sure why, because a lot of the works I enjoy listening to on the radio or on record, but – and it’s hard to put your finger on it – I always find it quite hard to engage as completely and as thoroughly when sitting in the concert hall with several hundred people as I do when I’m listening by myself. There is a sense of occasion, though, and I do try to go to the Proms a couple of times each year. What I do like in the concert hall is vocal and choral music, again because there is something non-musical to get your teeth



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into. If you don't have, as I don't, the musical knowledge, the language (I can't play a musical instrument, I can't read music), I always feel there's a lot that's passing me by, and I'm not getting as much out of it as I might. Whereas with choral music, while I'm sure that's still the case, it worries me less because I feel I'm getting the words, and the words are telling me a story. And I suspect, given the popularity of choral music down the centuries, I'm not alone.

I discovered relatively recently that I loved folk music, and that stemmed from listening to *Late Junction* on BBC Radio 3, and hearing Coope Boyes and Simpson, three *a cappella* folk singers. That led on to a voyage of discovery. We're going in two or three weeks to Harwich Shanty Festival. The old town in Harwich is very characterful, you look across to Felixstowe and see these vast ships, and there's something wonderful about spending three or four days there listening to English folk singers singing shanties. They also bring groups from the Continent – the German and Dutch had no tradition of sea shanties because singing was not allowed on German ships, so there now exists shanty choirs in Germany and the Netherlands which sing English shanties – they come and sing *The Leaving of Liverpool* in thick German accents. You also get French, Spanish and Catalan folk singers who do have a tradition of sailors' songs. That's very enjoyable. I just feel there's this huge corpus of folk music, and these battalions of folk singers, whose work I don't know, and it's too late to catch up. **G**

Nick Higham is currently writing a history of London's water supply

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